

**PRINCIPLED NON-VOTERS AND
POSTMATERIALIST THEORY:
AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF YOUNG
PRINCIPLED NON-VOTERS IN
NEW ZEALAND**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
in Political Science

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	ii
List of Tables and Figures.....	vii
Abstract.....	viii

Chapter One: Introduction 1

Introduction	1
New Zealand Electoral Turnout	2
Democracy and Participation	5
Influence of Postmaterialist Theory	6
Young Principled Non-voters.....	7
Thesis Outline	8

Chapter Two: Literature Review 11

Introduction	11
Democratic Theory.....	12
Ideals of Democracy	13
Crisis of Democracy	14
Democratic Malaise	15
Criticisms of Democracy.....	16
Representation.....	16
Trust.....	17
Political Parties	18
Dealignment.....	20
Participation	21
In Relation to New Zealand	22
In Relation to Youth.....	26
Voting Theories.....	28
Electoral Context	29
Rational Choice Theory	30

Resource Model	32
Mobilisation Model.....	33
Socialization Theory	34
Efficacy	35
Postmaterialist Theory	36
Conclusion.....	39
 Chapter Three: Youth Participation in a Comparative Perspective	40
Introduction	40
Young Non-voters in New Zealand	42
Young New Zealanders and Efficacy	42
Typologies of Young Non-voters in New Zealand.....	43
Postmaterialism	45
World Values Survey.....	47
New Zealand	48
World Values Survey	48
New Zealand Election Study	50
Social Values in New Zealand.....	52
Youth Participation Research Findings.....	53
New Zealand	53
Australia.....	54
Canada.....	57
North America (The United States and Canada)	58
United Kingdom.....	59
Summary	62
 Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Design	64
Introduction	64
Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methods.....	64
Quantitative.....	65
Qualitative.....	67

In-depth Interviews	69
Questionnaires	72
Ethics	74
Sampling Strategy	75
Participants and the Interview Process	77
Conclusion.....	80

Chapter Five: Research Findings and Analysis81

Introduction	81
Principled Non-voters	81
Non-voting	82
Efficacy	84
Question One: Why do young ‘principled non-voters’ not vote in general elections?	93
Question Two: How do young ‘principled non-voters’ choose to participate politically?	98
Question Three: Is there evidence that a lack of political representation motivates the participation of young ‘principled non-voters’?	105
Question Four: Are the political values of this group of young ‘principled non-voters’ consistent with those presented in postmaterialist theory?	110
Future	112
Discussion and Conclusion	115

Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusions.....119

Introduction	119
The Literature and the Research.....	120
The Health of Democracy	120
The Voting Theories	121
Trends in Voting Studies	122
Research Analysis	123
Future Research.....	124
Conclusion.....	125

Appendix One: Interview Schedule.....	126
Appendix Two: Potential Interviewee Questionnaire	127
Appendix Three: Interviewee Questionnaire	131
Appendix Four: Advertisement for Participants	136
Appendix Five: Information Sheet	137
Appendix Six: Consent Form.....	138
 Bibliography	 139

LIST OF TABLES AND GRAPHS

Graph 1.1: New Zealand Electoral Turnout since 1946.....	3
Table 2.1: Alternative Forms of Participation, 1993-2008.....	25
Table 3.1: Inglehart's Materialist/Postmaterialist Indices.....	46
Table 3.2: WVS Materialist/Postmaterialist Results for Individual Questions.....	49
Table 3.3: WVS Materialist/Postmaterialist Results based on Indices.....	50
Table 3.4: NZES Materialist/Postmaterialist Results.....	51
Table 4.1: Participant Profiles.....	78
Table 5.1: Principled Non-voters and Internal Efficacy.....	85
Table 5.2: Levels of Internal Efficacy.....	87
Table 5.3: Principled Non-voters and External Efficacy.....	88
Table 5.4: Levels of External Efficacy.....	92
Table 5.5: Interviewees Participation Rates in Last Three Years.....	99
Table 5.6: Materialist/Postmaterialist Results.....	110
Table 5.7: Summary Table.....	115

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the political attitudes and behaviour of young principled non-voters in New Zealand and explores the potential influence of postmaterialist theory on their decision not to vote in general elections. This research is primarily conducted through in-depth interviews with young principled non-voters with the goal of understanding their political motivations through their own words. Democratic theory, postmaterialist theory, leading voting theories and research relating to young people and New Zealand are all focused on to place the findings from the in-depth interviews in the context of wider literature and research.

The findings of this research suggest that, while postmaterialist theory is a potential influence on some of the young principled non-voters interviewed, the relationship between principled non-voters and postmaterialism is not as strong as expected. However, the findings did show consistently low levels support for the current systems of political representation and participation in New Zealand amongst those interviewed. This, as well as their support for alternative methods of participation, places the participants in line many of the current concerns for the health of representative democracies and traditional political practices. These principled non-voters also highlight the need for greater research into young non-voters in New Zealand, as they do not fit within traditional expectations of young apathetic non-voters.

Chapter One: Introduction

How can you choose if you don't have a choice

How can you choose if you don't have a voice

"Voting doesn't work" - Placebo

Citizen participation and voter turnout have been important parts of political science research for decades. Recent literature and studies from these particular areas of research have revealed unstable and often declining levels of voter turnout at elections in many industrial democracies, including New Zealand. As well as this, research is showing that involvement in alternative methods of political participation, such as boycotts, petitions and protests, is on the rise. These findings have prompted a movement within the research towards understanding the reasons behind changes in participation of citizens within many democracies. Some of the leading research on this topic relates the changing patterns of participation to broader changes in issue priorities and ideas around the realities of representative democracies. One of the most influential theories relating to this work is that of postmaterialist theory, which connects these trends to fundamental changes in the value priorities of different generations.

The implications for the health of democracy, as well as questions around the value of voting over less traditional methods of participation, the issue priorities of different generations and the future of citizen involvement in the political process, are all closely tied to this area of research. Also closely related to this are the political attitudes and behaviour of today's young people¹, described as 'Generation Y'², who are disproportionately represented amongst those not turning out to vote. The low turnout of youth has led to widely held perceptions of a politically apathetic generation, although research is also showing that today's young people are the most open to participating in alternative methods of

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, 'young' refers to those aged between 18 and 29. Throughout the literature, however, 'young people' are also commonly classified as 18-25 year olds.

² Members of 'Generation Y' are generally understood as those born throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, although this definition does vary.

participation. Whether youth are in fact demonstrating political apathy, or whether the political behaviour of today's young people is reflective of the broader societal changes being experienced throughout many industrial democracies, is a key focus of this thesis.

To address these issues, this thesis looks at young 'principled non-voters' and the influence that postmaterialist theory may have on their political attitudes and behaviour. Principled non-voters present a challenge to traditional perceptions of young non-voters, as they display a strong interest in politics yet make an active decision not to participate through voting. Through interviews with seven young principled non-voters, this thesis hopes to achieve three things. Firstly, it aims to challenge the traditionally held views of young people, particularly those who do not vote, by highlighting a group of young non-voters who cannot be described as apathetic or politically disinterested. Secondly, this thesis aims to add to the relevant literature by relating the findings from the interviews to the current trends within democracies. Finally, this thesis looks to understand any potential influence of postmaterialism on the attitudes and behaviour of the young principled non-voters studied.

This chapter introduces the essential elements of this thesis: electoral turnout in New Zealand, democracy and participation, postmaterialist theory, and young principled non-voters. Each section discusses the basics of each element and relates it to the general themes of this thesis. The chapter concludes with an outline of this thesis, including a description of each of the remaining chapters and an overview of the research questions.

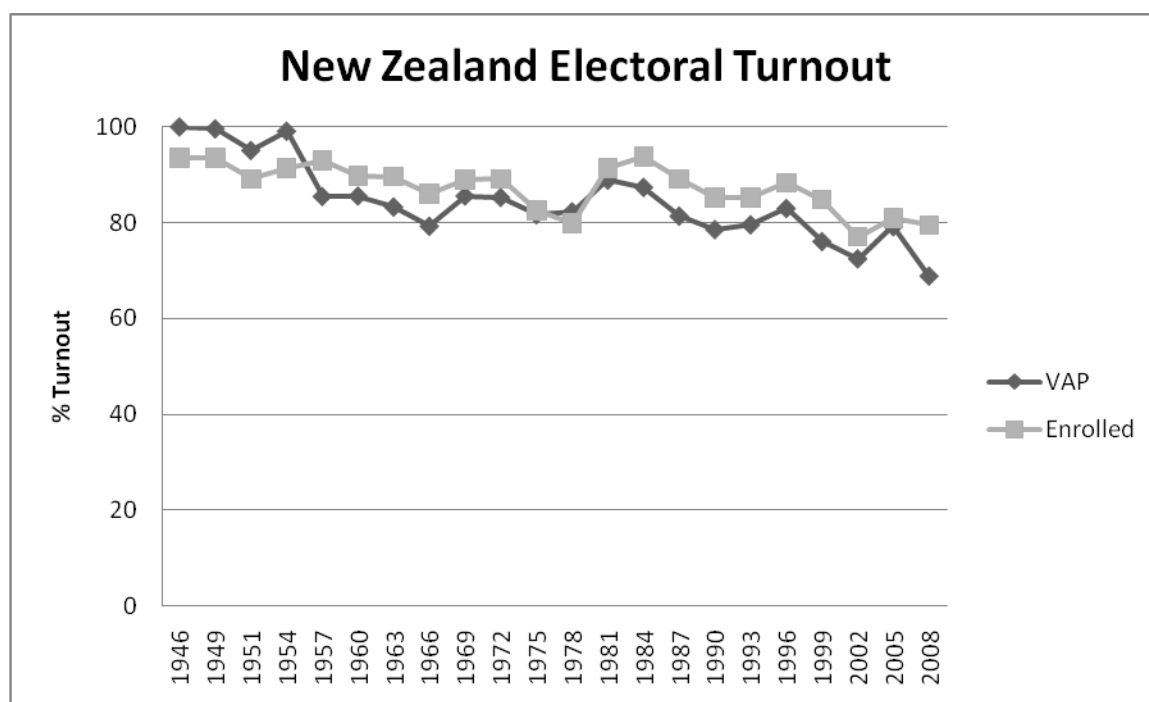
New Zealand Electoral Turnout -

Voter turnout at elections has become a focus of research over recent years, as many studies have highlighted the unstable and often declining levels of voter turnout within industrial democracies. New Zealand, despite its comparably high levels of voter turnout, is no exception. For decades, New Zealand has been associated with a high quality of democracy and high voter turnout. As well as important factors including universal franchise, fair and frequent elections, and a stable party system (Gustafson, 1969), it is argued that in New Zealand the act of voting itself is "deeply rooted in the collective psyche" (Atkinson,

2003: 10). New Zealand's electoral turnout is significantly higher than many other advanced democracies. Voter turnout in New Zealand has barely dropped below 80 percent³, particularly prior to the 1990s. This is important when compared to other parliamentary democracies, such as the United Kingdom, who consistently struggle to gain above 80 percent⁴ turnout at election time.

Graph 1.1: New Zealand Electoral Turnout since 1946

(based on both percentage of those enrolled and of the voting age population - VAP)



Despite these relatively high results, voter turnout in New Zealand is declining. In fact, New Zealand has experienced the eighth steepest turnout decline since 1945, out of twenty-two advanced democracies (Franklin, 2004). This decline has become most evident over the last decade, which is particularly significant in light of the change to a proportional representational (PR) system, Mixed Member Proportional (MMP), in 1996. Electoral system

³ Turnout figures for New Zealand taken from www.idea.int. When using the figures based on turnout of those enrolled, turnout in New Zealand has dropped below 80 percent in 1978 with 79.9 percent, 2002 with 77 percent, and 2008 with 79.5 percent.

⁴ Turnout figures for the United Kingdom taken from www.idea.int and are based on voter turnout of those enrolled. Since 1945, voter turnout in the UK has only registered above 80 percent twice (in 1950 and 1951).

reform is generally thought to encourage voter turnout, particularly a change to a PR system, as it produces election results that are more representative of how the citizenry vote. However, in the case of New Zealand, despite a slight increase at the first election under MMP, turnout has continued to decline. As can be seen on Graph 1.1, the three most recent elections in 2002, 2005 and 2008 have seen electoral turnout reach historical lows⁵. The election in 2002 achieved the lowest turnout in a century.

The issues of low and declining turnout in New Zealand become even more significant when using election results based on the percentage of voters from the voting age population. Most measures of electoral turnout are based on the proportion of those enrolled to vote, whereas recent studies promote the use of voting age population (VAP) statistics as a more accurate representation voter turnout⁶. These revised figures take in to account the entire number of citizens who are eligible to vote, regardless of whether or not they are on the electoral roll. The results based on the voting age population detailed in Graph 1.1 above provide an even clearer picture of low turnout in New Zealand. According to these results, turnout in New Zealand is consistently lower than what is widely reported. The largest disparity between the official results and turnout based on those eligible to vote occurred at the most recent election in 2008, which reported a gap of 10.6 percent, leaving turnout based on VAP at only 68.9 percent.

Whilst general turnout decline is an issue, the disengagement of young people from the political process is an even greater concern. Specific turnout figures for young New Zealanders are difficult to locate, although the information available demonstrates the issues with youth participation at election time. At the 1996, 1999 and 2002 elections, the turnout of 18-24 year olds was 15-19 percent lower than the results for the general population (Catt & Northcote, 2006). In 2002, 38 percent of 18-24 year olds did not vote (www.elections.govt.nz). As well as being less likely to vote than the rest of the population, young people are also less likely to be enrolled to vote. In 2005, over half of those not enrolled were aged 18-24. In the lead up to the most recent election in 2008, one in five young people were not enrolled (www.elections.govt.nz). These figures support the

⁵ Based on those enrolled, turnout fell to 77 percent in 2002, 80.9 percent in 2005 and 79.5 percent in 2008. Turnout has been comparatively low only three times in the last one hundred years; 79.8 percent in 1908, 80.5 percent in 1914, and 79.9 percent in 1979.

⁶ See, for example, www.idea.int

widespread fears around the disengagement of Generation Y, or ‘Generation Why Bother’ (Langesen, 2008). Despite the perception of young people as apathetic, however, recent research is showing that young people are increasingly open to alternative methods of participation.

Democracy and Participation -

In studying electoral turnout, it is important to address democratic theory and trends in participation in order to fully understand the context of current voter behaviour. This is in part due to the general perception of voter turnout as a reflection of the level of support for the democratic institutions within a society. As a result of this, the declining voter turnout being experienced across industrial democracies has led to increasing attention within the literature towards the intricacies of democratic practices.

Recent studies of democracy as a concept and as a system of government have focused on the disparity between democratic ideals and the realities of modern representative democracies. Writing in 1977, Lijphart describes democracy as:

“a concept that virtually defies definition...it is not a system of government that fully embodies ideals, but one that approximates them to a reasonable degree (Lijphart, 1977: 4).

More recent trends in democratic literature are now questioning how well these ideals are in fact represented in modern democracies. The limitations of contemporary representative democracies, particularly issues between citizens and their representatives are reflected in the findings of decreasing trust in politicians, declining membership of political parties and declining voter turnout. While these occurrences are generally associated with apathy, current literature is arguing that the issues with democracy have instead prompted citizens to search for political engagement through less traditional means. Although Dalton (2000) refers to these trends as a “new crisis of the democratic spirit” (2000: 253), the author also describes what is occurring in a more encouraging light:

“Strengthened commitments to the democratic ideal and increased skills and resources among contemporary publics are leading to increased political participation outside the boundaries of representative democracy” (Dalton, 2000: 268).

Political participation outside of traditional electoral methods is frequently referred to as unconventional participation. However, political involvement through these more active and direct forms of participation, such as protest or boycotts, are becoming more accepted. The growing popularity of these activities from the 1970s onwards is closely related to the emergence of ‘new politics’. New politics, and the influence this development has had on the political participation of citizens, forms the broad basis of this thesis. Work by Marks (1997), aptly describes the shift in priorities that new politics represents:

“It represents an articulate worldview that dissents from traditional assumptions, such as the necessity and benefit of continuing economic growth, the trustworthiness of governments and private organizations as responsible decision makers, the separate gender roles for men and women, and the implicit superiority of Western culture” (Marks, 1997: 52).

Influence of Postmaterialist Theory -

Included in the area of ‘new politics’ is the study of postmaterialist theory, which for over thirty years has been led by Ronald Inglehart (1977, 1981, 1997, 2008). Inglehart’s work on postmaterialist theory and value change is argued to be “the most prominent and best developed theory of new politics” (Marks, 1997: 52). Within his work on postmaterialism, Inglehart focuses on the fundamental economic, social and political shifts that have occurred across societies following World War II. While Inglehart has been following these changes for decades, the relevancy of this work to the current trends in democratic literature is particularly notable. An important aspect of Inglehart’s work relates the current political experiences within industrial democracies to the economic and social shifts that have occurred. Inglehart argues that, as a result of economic stability and social advancement, a

shift in value priorities has taken place. He maintains that this has affected politics in a variety of ways.

Firstly, Inglehart argues that the newly found economic stability has allowed ‘survival to be taken for granted’, prompting a change in the issue priorities of citizens away from economic concerns and towards self-expression values such as the environment and human rights. This has affected the ability of political parties to represent many citizens, as most political parties within these industrial democracies have maintained their focus on survival issues. As a result, Inglehart argues that many citizens are looking for political representation through means other than traditional political parties, which has increased the popularity of green parties and issue groups.

As well as the impact on political party support, Inglehart argues that these shifts have affected the ways in which many citizens are participating. As issue priorities change and citizens feel that these new issues are not represented in traditional electoral politics, the appeal of participating through methods other than voting increases. This is because of the advantage of non-traditional methods, including protests, petitions and boycotts, as being able to target a specific issue. Inglehart argues that voting for a political party does not allow citizens to demonstrate their opinion on specific issue, as political parties must hold stances on a variety of issues, all of which will not necessarily reflect an individual’s point of view. Inglehart acknowledges the additional benefits participation through less traditional methods provide, as they require more active involvement and mean that citizens do not need to be reliant on their elected representatives. The arguments put forward by Inglehart align his work with many of the key aspects of young principled non-voters.

Young Principled Non-voters -

The specific goal of this thesis is to understand the political attitudes and behaviour of young principled non-voters. The term ‘principled non-voter’ comes from work by Sheerin (2007), which looked at the influence of efficacy theory on voting and non-voting behaviour. Through interviews with young New Zealanders, Sheerin (2007) identified one young non-

voter who presented a challenge to general perceptions of young non-voters as he displayed relatively high levels of internal and external efficacy yet had made an active decision not to vote in elections. There is no specific definition provided for a young ‘principled non-voter’, although they can be loosely described as those under the age of 30 who have made an active and conscious decision not to vote. Additionally, these young people show a genuine interest in politics and have relatively high levels of internal efficacy, in particular, which distances them from the traditional perceptions of young non-voters. In concluding her research, Sheerin (2007) suggested the need for further exploration of the attitudes and behaviour of young principled non-voters and specified postmaterialist theory as a potential influence on these young non-voters.

These suggestions by Sheerin (2007) were the impetus for this thesis, as her research raised important questions around the issues of non-voting, the political participation of young people and the potential influence of postmaterialist theory on current trends of political behaviour. This is a valuable area of research as it provides the opportunity to highlight a group of non-apathetic young non-voters and to better understand how they choose to participate. It also provides scope for exploring postmaterialist theory and looking in to any influence this may have on the political attitudes of these young non-voters. By doing this, this research draws attention to the broader themes currently being experienced within many industrial democracies relating to declining voter turnout and changing ideas around political participation and representation.

Thesis Outline -

In approaching the issues discussed above, this thesis asks whether postmaterialist theory is an influence on the political attitudes and behaviour of young ‘principled non-voters’. The hypothesis here is that postmaterialist theory describes the phenomenon of young ‘principled non-voters’. Within this topic, this thesis aims to address the following research questions:

- . Why do young ‘principled non-voters’ not vote in general elections?

- . How do young ‘principled non-voters’ choose to participate politically?
- . Is there evidence that a lack of political representation motivates the participation of young ‘principled non-voters’?
- . Are the political values of this group consistent with those presented in postmaterialist theory?

The focus of each of the remaining chapters is now outlined. Chapter Two, the ‘Literature Review’, provides a summary of the most relevant literature to the study of citizen participation and voting behaviour. It begins with a focus on democratic theory and the ‘ideals of democracy’, and then follows the progression of recent literature on this topic from ‘the crisis of democracy’ through to work on ‘democratic malaise’. This includes discussion on representation and participation, and relates the trends in the literature to relevant work on New Zealand and young people. This chapter then turns to the dominant voting theories of the last century. Each theory is outlined with a focus on their explanations for declining voter turnout and the act of not voting. The chapter concludes by introducing postmaterialist theory as an explanation for the current patterns in turnout decline, citizen participation and support for democracy.

The purpose of Chapter Three, ‘Youth Participation in a Comparative Perspective’, is to identify and explore the most relevant research and studies to the important aspects of this thesis: young people, political participation in New Zealand, and postmaterialism. The chapter begins by isolating the studies that most closely relate to this thesis, particularly that of Sheerin (2007), which discusses young principled non-voters in New Zealand. The focus then turns to the study of postmaterialist theory in relation to political participation, both internationally and from within New Zealand. Youth political participation is then focused on, by outlining key studies from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, which focus on how today’s young people are participating and their attitudes towards politics. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the theoretical framework this thesis employs to guide the research.

Chapter Four, ‘Research Methodology and Design’, explains the methodology of this thesis. It begins by summarising the literature on qualitative and quantitative research,

interviews and questionnaires, sampling, and ethics. It also discusses the specific techniques chosen for this thesis and explains in detail the participants and the interview process.

Chapter Five, 'Research Findings and Analysis' focuses on the core of this thesis - the attitudes and behaviour of young principled non-voters. From the information gained through the interviews and questionnaires with the participants, this chapter seeks to answer the main research questions. These questions deal with the issues of why the participants do not vote, how they participate, and the influence of postmaterialism. This chapter also outlines the participants' own thoughts on their future political attitudes and behaviour. Finally, this chapter relates the findings from the interviews and questionnaires to the literature on the health of democracy, voting theories and postmaterialist theory, which guide this thesis.

The final chapter, Chapter Six 'Recommendations and Conclusion', summarises the research, discusses the issues that arose during the research process and highlights interesting areas for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction -

The very definition of a democracy implies the participation of citizens in its decision-making processes. The term ‘democracy’ is understood as ‘rule by the people’, translated from the Greek *demokratika* with *demos* meaning ‘people’ and *kratos* meaning ‘rule’ (Williams, 1976). The contemporary reality of representative democracies has seen voting in elections become the accepted and most realistic form of this citizen participation. However, voting and the realities of representative democracies have also called into question many of the premises surrounding the key functions of a democracy. As a result, the study of democratic institutions and the potential for involvement by citizens within the political processes of these societies has become an important area of research. This has become particularly relevant recently as these societies experience unstable and often declining levels of voter turnout. Whilst this in itself raises concerns for the health of democracy within these countries, even more troubling for the future of democracy are the trends of declining voter turnout amongst young people.

The first section of this literature review provides an overview of the traditional perceptions of a democracy in order to contextualise the current criticisms being levelled against contemporary democracies. These criticisms are then discussed, and relate to the modern realities of democracy and their departure from the ideals of a democratic system. The subsequent issues that have emerged are often interpreted as a threat to democracy itself, whereas alternative areas of thought perceive the changes as positive influences for the quality of democracy. This debate on the health of democracy is then outlined, as is the relevancy of all of these concerns to both young people and New Zealand.

An associated issue that is causing great concern are the levels of voter turnout within many representative democracies and this issue, non-voting, represents the background of this thesis. An overview of the most dominant voting theories found within the literature follows, in order to contextualise the study of non-voting. The relevancy of each theory to youth non-voting and voter turnout in New Zealand will be addressed, as will their

relationship to the current concerns for democracy. From this analysis, postmaterialism emerges as a leading theory for the discussion of changing voting patterns, changing political participation and changing perceptions of democracy. Consequently, postmaterialism is used as the dominant theory for this thesis and tested with the purpose of understanding the political motivations of young principled non-voters in New Zealand.

Democratic Theory -

Understanding political participation and the voting behaviour of citizens should begin with exploring a foundation of contemporary politics, democracy. The political participation of citizens within democratic nations has become an important area of research, as it is the involvement of citizens within the political process that is fundamental to democracy. Kaase and Marsh (1979) support this with their assertion that “if democracy is rule by the people...then the notion of political participation is at the center of the concept of the democratic state” (1979: 28). Democracy has become the dominant and ‘ideal’ political system that other forms of government are held against, with alternative systems often being argued to have lost their legitimacy or to have simply disappeared (Dahl, 1998: 1). Beyond democracy as a political system, democratic organisation in numerous facets of society is often an expectation and the term has become a part of our everyday language. As Catt (1999) states, “as a part of the widespread desire for democracy, it is often used as a blanket term of approval for life in the West in relation to both institutions and cultural norms” (1999:4). The ideals of democratic organisation have become expected and admired and, as Christiano (1996) argues, “these kind of beliefs come automatically to most citizens of Western states” (1996: 3). However, it is a term that can be overused and misunderstood, which invites concern that “a term that can mean anything to anyone is in danger of meaning nothing at all” (Heywood, 2002: 68). Along a similar vein is Huntington’s (1981) idea of the ‘creedal passion’, which argues that “democracy was threatened by the public’s belief that democracy should function in line with its ideals” (Dalton, 2000: 262). Accordingly, the assumptions and expectations of democracy can and often do exceed its reality.

Ideals of Democracy

“Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, and for the people”

- Abraham Lincoln (Gettysburg Address, 19 November, 1863)⁷

The ideals of democracy, which are often seen as providing for the popularity and dominance of democratic systems in both the political and social spheres, also receive a lot of attention in the literature. For example, Almond and Verba (1963) describe what they label the ‘great ideas’ of democracy as “elevating and inspiring concepts” (Almond & Verba, 1963: 5), which include “the freedoms and dignities of the individual [and] the principle of government by consent of the governed” (Almond & Verba, 1963: 5). For Christiano (1996), democracy represents three basic ideals: popular sovereignty, political equality and discussion, but also “embodies moral ideals to which most people in modern society have a deep and abiding allegiance” (1996: 4)⁸. Thompson (1970) defines a democratic system as one that is “responsive to the interests of most of the citizens but also that the citizens share in governing” (1970: 3). Similarly, Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) argue that citizen participation is at the heart of democracy and that democracy is “unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the governing process” (1995: 1).

Regular, competitive and free elections have become the basis for this essential citizen participation in representative democracies such as New Zealand, as they provide the majority of the people within a democracy the opportunity for involvement in the political process through voting (Mulgan, 2004). Elections are widely understood to be fundamental to the functioning of a democracy, and are “invariably considered one of the critical features that define a nation as ‘democratic’” (LeDuc, Niemi & Norris, 1996: 4). As a result of the position of elections as a relatively fair and feasible mechanism for citizen participation, casting a vote at election time has arguably become the most accepted form of political participation for the general public. Therefore, participation in elections can be understood as a gauge for the level of involvement of citizens in their democracy and, as a result, voter turnout has come to be a representation of support for the democratic processes within a

⁷ Heywood, A. (2002) *Politics, Second Edition*, Hampshire: Palgrave.

⁸ Beetham (2002) describes similar democratic principles as Christiano (1996), then elaborates on these basic principles by including additional mediating values: participation, authorisation, representation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and solidarity (Beetham, 2002).

country. While traditionally a vote has been considered sufficient means for the public to be involved in the decision-making processes of their nation, this premise is being questioned as the realities of contemporary representative democracies are better understood. Through the necessity of citizen participation and the role elections play in this, it becomes clear how declining levels of voter turnout can be, and often are, perceived as a threat to democracy.

Crisis of Democracy

“Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide”

- John Adams (letter, April 15, 1814)

Although the intricacies of democracy have been a source of scrutiny from its inception, it is accepted that genuine concerns for the future of democracy emerged with its growth in popularity (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975). From 1945, following the end of World War II, several countries adopted democracy during a period referred to as the second ‘wave’ of democracy (Huntington, 1991). As the number of countries with the political system grew, so too did fears for its sustainability within these nations. In 1975, following increased pressure on governments through issues like the Vietnam War, a report on the state of democracy within the United States, Japan and Western Europe was published. *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975) was the result of a Trilateral Commission established by these nations, set up to explore the problems with democracy and to work towards resolving these problems collectively. The report concluded that there was widespread “dissatisfaction with and lack of confidence in the functioning of the institutions of democratic government” (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975: 158). Within this general conclusion, four specific issues with the state of these democracies were highlighted. Broadly, these issues were the ‘delegitimation’ of authority and loss of trust in leadership, overloaded governments due to the expansion of political participation, declining and fragmenting political parties, and finally the encouragement of ‘nationalistic parochialism’ within foreign relations (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975: 161).

The report concluded that all of these problems were, ironically, a result of democracy functioning successfully and as it should, yet were the very reasons that democracy was seen

to be in crisis. As explained by Norris (1999), “nineteenth-century institutions of representative democracy seemed unable to cope with twentieth-century demands, producing what appeared to be the crisis of the overloaded state” (1999: 4). Decades after *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975) was published, the report remains very important and influential to the study of democracy. Although many of its predictions for the future of democracy did not occur as forecasted, particularly given the period of confidence and stability for democracy seen during the 1980s (Norris, 1999), the issues being experienced then hold remarkable similarity to what is thought to be occurring today within representative democracies.

Democratic Malaise

“...the moment a people allows itself to be represented, it is no longer free”

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1913: 265)

In current evaluations of democracy, *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975) is often used as a foundation for assessing whether democracy is, or will be, in a state of crisis, largely because of the saliency of many of the issues raised. Much of this recent literature argues that Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki’s “grim outlook for democracy” (Putnam, Pharr & Dalton, 2000: 4) overstated the situation and “underestimated the adaptive capabilities of the modern state” (Norris, 1999: 4). However, the work is still used as a comparison due to the similarities between what was seen during the 1960s and 1970s and what is being experienced today, although the term ‘crisis’ has been replaced with less provocative terms, such as ‘malaise’ (Verba *et al*, 1995; Norris, 1999). What is emphasised within these recent interpretations of the state of democracy is that although concerns relating to issues like trust, political parties and political participation are significant, they do not translate to the end of democracy. It is instead argued that these issues represent changing public attitudes towards, and growing disillusionment with, many of the premises that democracy stands upon. Dalton, Scarrow and Cain (2006) argue that citizens are now displaying “a growing willingness to question whether a fundamental commitment to the principles and institutions of representative democracy is sufficient” (2006: 1).

Although there is concern that this disillusionment could develop further towards indifference and apathy and constitute a serious threat to democracy as a whole, research has demonstrated that most citizens of democratic nations continue to support democracy, in general, as their political system (Putnam, Pharr & Dalton, 2000). The authors of this research found “no evidence of declining commitment to the principles of democratic government or to the democratic regimes in our countries” (Putnam, Pharr & Dalton, 2000: 7). Instead, their research found that recent concerns with democracy are related to the “popular confidence in the performance of representative institutions” (Putnam, Pharr & Dalton, 2000: 8), which is consistent with the concerns outlined above. Similarly, Klingemann (1999) argues that “there are no major trends suggesting a decline in support for democracy as a form of government in the abstract” (1999: 31) and furthermore, Norris (1999) argues that “most citizens in well-established and in newer democracies share widespread aspirations for the ideals and principles of democracy” (1999: 1). It is these issues of representation, trust, and ideals, rather than concerns with democracy as an overriding concept, which have brought many of the realities of contemporary democracies into question and have translated into potential problems for voter turnout within many Western democracies.

Criticisms of Democracy -

Representation

With the evolution of democracy from a classical concept of ‘rule by the people’, to the contemporary reality of representative democracies, many of the ideals of democracy as a political system have come under scrutiny. Green (1993) argues that beyond a general philosophy of majority rule, there is little else evident in modern representative governments reminiscent of the traditional ideals of democracy. For Green (1993), as with many other democratic theorists (Thompson, 1970; Christiano, 1996; Dahl, 1998), the realities of representative democracies leaves the level of influence awarded to ‘the people’ open to criticism. The modern conception of democracy “allows for less active involvement since in a large, industrialized state it is impossible for all citizens to be consulted on most of the

decisions which have to be made” (Thompson, 1970: 2). As Christiano (1996) explains, “citizens cannot make the laws themselves, they must have representatives who make laws for them” (1996: 7). Kaase and Newton (1998) acknowledge that the feasibility of representation has ‘saved’ democracy as the dominant ideology of the modern state, yet argue that this representation has “caused a great many citizens to become structurally divorced from participation in day-to-day decision-making” (1998: 128).

Additionally, the ability of those elected to represent the citizenry is raised by Green (1993), as he argues that “government ‘by the people’ actually consists of government by elites” (1993: 5). Elsewhere, those selected to govern are labelled as an “elitist body of elected representatives” (Narud and Aalberg, 1999: 19), adding to the image of distance between the representatives and the represented. In earlier work by Green (1985), the author describes the paradox of representative democracies, given that the political elites elected to speak on behalf and make decisions for the citizenry “lead lives grossly different from those of ordinary persons” (Green, 1985: 177). Green (1985) argues that as a result of this, a ‘pseudorepresentative’ government “turns political access and influence into an episodic and occasional or even nonexistent event in the lives of most people” (1985: 178). By exploring the relationship between those elected as decision-makers and the constituents who elect them, this area of the literature emphasises the effect the distance between representatives and the represented can have on the voting public, leading to the potential for disillusionment and apathy.

Trust

A further area of concern in modern democracies, which is related to problems with representation, is the level of political trust held by citizens in their politicians and political institutions. Political trust was an important aspect of the conclusions reached by Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki (1975), and recent research has suggested that “political trust underlies much of the political attitudes and electoral behaviour of most people, including that of youth” (Print, Saha & Edwards, 2004: 20). Newton (1999) discusses political trust at the individual level, arguing that the influences and pressures of modern political life have strained the once trusting relationship between citizens and politicians. To support this claim,

Newton (1999) compares modern democratic society with the early democratic experiences that were seen at the beginning of the twentieth century. This discussion highlights the change from political trust that was “once based on social identities and ideological loyalties, and reinforced by personal ties and similarities” (Newton, 1999: 179), to a relationship that is “more pragmatic, instrumental, and dependent upon second-hand political information and performance” (Newton, 1999: 179). Factors including larger populations, more critical media, a broader scope of government, more pragmatic politics and higher democratic expectations have all contributed to a political environment where the public’s allegiance to and trust of politicians is not as clear, and politicians are under greater scrutiny by the media and their constituents.

Concerns about declining levels of political trust go beyond political leaders to the distrust of whole government institutions. Miller and Listhaug (1999) cite empirical research that has shown a steady trend of growing distrust in government institutions from the 1970s throughout a number of countries, a trend which they claim is characteristic of contemporary industrialized societies. The authors offer two associated explanations for this occurrence; growing public dissatisfaction with, and higher expectations of, government performance. From their research, Miller and Listhaug (1999) conclude that the growing distrust of government can be attributed to higher expectations from citizens. This declining trust in political institutions is seen to be a direct threat to democracy, as Newton and Norris (2000) argue, “An erosion of confidence in the major institutions of society, especially those of representative democracy, is a far more serious threat to democracy than a loss of trust in other citizens or politicians” (2000: 52). However, as has previously been discussed, these changes can also be understood as a positive development for the health of democracy. These findings also provide further evidence of changing political attitudes and behaviour within the public and help to provide a context for the argued departure from traditional sentiments and the emergence of a new style of citizen politics.

Political Parties

An additional development in the relationship between politicians and the general public that has affected democracy and, more specifically voting patterns, is the erosion of

political party alignment that has occurred in Western democracies over recent decades. Political parties are renowned as one of the only mechanisms that allow modern representative democracies to function⁹, yet developments have seen party membership decline and subsequently the importance of political parties called into question. Important work by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) on modern party systems best explains the stability experienced by political parties throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century's across Western democracies.

The authors state that social cleavages created out of the National and Industrial Revolutions persisted and were then institutionalised in divisions at the political level. Political parties formed as a reflection of these cleavage lines and were able to rely on consistent support from their associated social groups, creating what were labelled as 'frozen' party systems. As a result, an individual's voting choices and behaviour were often closely related to, for example, their religious beliefs or class position, and these alignments were easily continued through generations. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argue that political parties and their levels of core support were therefore relatively stable and that "the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with but few significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s" (1967: 50). However, in the decades since this work was first published, these party systems have been experiencing change that has dramatically affected the stability that they were once characterised by.

As was highlighted in *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975) and continues today, the once established political parties are faced with new demands by their voters and challenges from the formation of new parties, which have resulted in less 'frozen' party systems and predictable voting patterns, as well as declining party membership (Dalton, 2002: 133). Explanations for the aptly named 'thawing' of the party systems in Western democracies vary, including the effect of regional and economic tensions, technological developments, and the emergence of new value priorities. However, Dalton (2002) maintains that "at the root of this development was a weakening relationship between traditional social cleavages and partisan choice (2002: 133), which has subsequently had a great impact on voter choices and behaviour.

⁹ Dalton & Wattenberg (2000) make reference to claims by a number of sources of the integral role of political parties, including the conclusion that "modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties" from Schattschneider, E. E. (1942), *Party Government*, New York: Rinehart.

Dealignment

Advancing on his ideas of changing party systems and voting behaviour, Dalton (2002) discusses the progression from strong partisan attachments, as presented by authors such as Lipset and Rokkan (1967), to what he labels a ‘dealignment’ of the party system. Dalton (2002) argues that this dealignment has come about in part through a process of ‘cognitive mobilization’ from the spread of education and information sources, which have resulted in a situation where “more citizens now have the political resources and skills that prepare them to deal with the complexities of politics and make their own political decisions” (2002: 19). Whereas in the past voting decisions were simply made from ‘partisan cues’, studies undertaken throughout Western democracies have confirmed claims of declining party identification and have shown that voters no longer rely on their traditional alliances and are instead able to cast more informed votes (Dalton, 2002)¹⁰. This is in part due to developments such as the expansion of further education and advances in technology, which have transformed the ability of the media and citizens to distribute and obtain far more information from the political world on a daily basis. Dalton (2002) also argues that politics has become more issue-focused, and therefore voters will often make their political decisions based on individual issues rather than general party ideologies. This can dramatically affect the way political parties approach an election, how voters choose to vote, and, perhaps most significantly, presents citizens with the opportunity to participate outside of voting through means that are more specific to their issue, such as protesting.

Higher levels of education and a more informed electorate are traditionally thought to have a positive effect on the political involvement of citizens, particularly in relation to voter turnout. Education is argued to be one of the most influencing factors on whether an individual votes or not, with research showing that those with a university education are more likely to vote (Franklin, 2004). Education is argued to improve participation for many reasons, which include learning about government and politics, encouraging attitudes such as responsibility and civic duty, and fostering confidence in being capable of engaging with politics (Verba *et al*, 1995; Evans, 2004). Despite these perceptions and findings, Dalton (2002) argues that the process of dealignment “has been accompanied by the decline in

¹⁰ The main electoral studies that are analysed by Dalton (2002) to help draw these conclusions are from the United States, Great Britain, Germany and France, however the author also states that “In nations as diverse as Austria, Canada, Japan, and New Zealand, the pattern is the same” (2002: 185).

electoral participation” (2002: 187). Instead of encouraging a rise in traditional participation, this development of cognitive mobilization is argued to have contributed to the expansion of political participation to include “more demanding forms of political activity” (Dalton, 2002: 23).

Participation

Norris (2002) also leads the discussion on this shift towards more active political participation with her work on the ‘democratic phoenix’ effect. This argument describes citizen participation as transforming, rather than declining, as new forms of participation have emerged and grown and replaced the older forms (Vowles, 2004). Following from Dalton’s (2002) theories detailed above, Norris (2002) argues that these developments have led to demands within post-industrial societies for more active participation in the policy-making process and that this is being realised through direct action, new social movements and protest groups (Norris, 2002: 19). These arguments are not new, as the rise of direct action and its effectiveness in communicating directly with decision makers and attaining the goals of citizens is discussed in relation to the 1960s and 1970s by writers such as Thompson (1970). At this time, Thompson (1970) advocated for many of these alternative methods to become accepted as ‘legitimate’ forms of participation. Writing over thirty years later, Norris (2002) argues that the end of the twentieth century saw a dramatic rise in the willingness of citizens to engage in protest politics as well as the emergence of many new methods of civic engagement, mobilisation and expression, which have supplemented traditional forms of participation. As these alternative forms of participation have become more popular and accepted, Norris (2002) argues that the governments within these societies are now faced with a new challenge of “balancing and aggregating more complex demands from multiple channels” (2002: 212). Whilst these developments may have created difficulties for governments, the opportunities available to citizens as a result of these new and diverse forms of engagement are considered to be positive for the health of representative democracy (Norris, 2002).

Similarly, the influence of higher education and cognitive mobilization on encouraging political action is interpreted by Narud and Aalberg (1999) as a positive

progression of the declining levels of trust and confidence in government being experienced in many democratic nations. The authors argue that the skills and resources gained from being better educated and informed have seen citizens become “functionally more independent of the traditional institutions, enabling them to assess and evaluate the competence and effectiveness of political authorities” (Narud and Aalberg, 1999: 36). This in turn sees citizens become “inclined to participate more directly by using non-institutional forms of political action to pursue their goals” (Narud and Aalberg, 1999: 36). These processes of dealignment and cognitive mobilization have contributed to the development of a more politically informed and active citizenry, who have arguably become more open to making their political decisions based on issue positions rather than traditional ideological alignments and who are more confident in participating politically beyond voting.

In relation to New Zealand -

At the time of its publication, New Zealand’s political institutions faced similar difficulties to those described in *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975). From around the mid-1960s, the electorate’s previously widespread confidence and trust in its politicians and political institutions began to slowly diminish. Research looking at the trust and confidence of New Zealander’s in Parliament and their politicians shows that what were already relatively low levels of trust continued to decline dramatically over the following decades to reach a low of 4 per cent in 1992 (Atkinson, 2003: 211).¹¹ Many factors contributed to this, including the social and economic changes that were being experienced globally following the end of the post-war economic boom (Atkinson, 2003). The emergence of new political movements and issues also affected New Zealand, and issues such as the Vietnam War, Apartheid, and the threat of nuclear war “contributed to an increasingly volatile political scene” (Atkinson, 2003: 177).

In particular, New Zealand’s political system at the time, First-Past-the-Post (FPP), was a large source of dissatisfaction. The effectiveness of this two-party system in

¹¹ Results from Heylen Research Centre *Full Trust and Confidence* polls; 1975 trust was at 32.6 per cent, 1981 at 14.4 per cent, 1985 at 10.7 per cent and 1989 it was at 5.7 per cent (Levine & McRobie, 2002: viii).

representing the electorate was questioned, largely due to the new issues that were emerging, but also specifically as a result of the growing discrepancies between how the electorate voted and how this was represented in the make-up of Parliament.¹² This signified an important example of citizens questioning the quality of their democracy, as many people within New Zealand began exploring “whether there might not be a better way of making political decisions” (Levine & McRobie, 2002: xi). Over the following decades incremental steps were taken, including a Royal Commission and two referenda, which eventuated in the rare outcome of electoral system reform. The decision to allow the public to choose whether or not to make this change through the use of referenda is suggested as being an “opportunistic way to seek to reaffirm popular faith in the legitimacy of the democratic system” (Jackson, 1993: 17) as a response to the decreasing levels of public trust and confidence in New Zealand’s political environment. The eventual change in 1996 to the proportional representation (PR) system, Mixed Member Proportional (MMP), has seen a dramatic change in the make-up of New Zealand’s Parliament.

Since New Zealand’s first election under MMP, the number of parties gaining seats and being involved in government formation has significantly increased, as have the diversity of the politicians being elected and the issues being represented. Internationally, electoral reform is perceived as a positive outcome for the quality of democracy, with the process described as having “the potential to push forward the boundaries of our knowledge of democratic institutions and performance” (LeDuc, Niemi & Norris: 1996: 5). Despite the change to proportional representation (PR), and the perceived effects of this for aspects of representative democracy, New Zealand’s disillusionment with politicians has remained (Henderson & Bellamy, 2002). Similarly, although “both theory and experience indicate that a change of electoral system to PR should have encouraged turnout revival” (Vowles, 2002: 587), voter turnout in New Zealand has continued to decline.

¹² FPP is known as a ‘winner takes all’ system, as the candidate who wins the most votes in their electorate, irrespective of the margin, gains a seat in parliament. The party that wins a majority of these seats in parliament then forms a government by itself. One of the main issues that this raises is the discrepancy between the proportion of seats a party gains in parliament and the percentage of votes a party gained in the overall popular vote. Invariably, the winning party’s majority in parliament is larger than their support across the country, while other parties are often underrepresented. This is most evident with smaller and newer parties, who can often win a reasonable percentage of the overall vote, but rarely a majority within one electorate, meaning they gain no representation. It is because of this that many feel that votes are ‘wasted’ under FPP. (McRobie, 1993: 25-27).

In relation to many other established democracies, New Zealand's turnout levels are consistently and significantly higher.¹³ However, New Zealand has also experienced the eighth steepest decline in voter turnout of established democracies since 1945 (Franklin, 2004: 11). The change of electoral system and the subsequent rise and diversification of political parties has also done little to stop New Zealand from following the international trend of declining political party membership, as it fell to an estimated 2.4 per cent of voters in 2005 (Miller, 2005). Beyond party membership, the more general concern for the declining influence and existence of partisanship are argued to be part of larger trends of volatility amongst voters in New Zealand (Vowles *et al.*, 2002; Mulgan, 2004). This illustrates that, despite the potentially positive step of electoral system reform and the comparatively high levels of voter turnout in New Zealand, this country has not escaped the international trends of declining trust, turnout and partisanship, as well as the changing perceptions of participation and democracy.

As is previously discussed, political participation through conventional means such as voting and political party membership is in decline, although this decline is often argued to be a result of a 'rearrangement' of public participation, given the increased popularity of less traditional forms of participation (Hayward, 2006: 518). Research on the political behaviour and attitudes of New Zealanders is fairly limited, although there is some evidence that the participation trends may be reflective of these international changes. The New Zealand Election Study (NZES), conducted around the time of each general election since 1990, offers an insight into political participation in this country. The NZES surveys participants on a number of issues, including broad areas relating to democracy, the electoral system and representation, as well as election particulars including the campaign, issues and the media. A specific section on participation explores the way those surveyed have participated politically over the previous five years or more, through both traditional and non-traditional forms of participation, as well as gauging their level of involvement in their communities. The frequency of the less traditional methods of political participation surveyed includes signing petitions, protesting, product boycotts and occupying buildings. The NZES results for the alternative methods of participation, which are of the most interest here, are detailed in Table 2.1 below.

¹³ New Zealand comes 13th on IDEA's 'League table by country vote to registration ratio, parliamentary elections, 1945-2001', which is behind Australia (1st, although with compulsory voting), but well ahead of Germany at 33rd, the United Kingdom at 76th, France at 84th and the United States at 120th (Pintor *et al.*, 2002).

In general, these results demonstrate that this behaviour has been relatively stable overtime. ‘Boycotting’ is an exception to this, as the results show a large increase in the popularity of this method of participation. Vowles (2004) questions the importance of this finding, however, as he argues that boycotting does not fit in to normal understandings of political participation or civic engagement because it does not require any public action (Vowles, 2004: 10). The dominance of petition signing is also interesting, as it is arguably the most passive form of alternative participation, whereas the more active forms of participation, such as protest, appear to be less popular. Significantly, however, around a fifth of the population consistently report having participated in a protest at some point.

Table 2.1: Alternative Forms of Participation, 1993-2005

(Percentage of respondents that had participated in each form during the previous 5 years or more)

	1993	1996	1999	2002	2005
Signed Petition	80	67	83	76	73
Written to paper	19	14	15	13	14
Boycotted	12	-	36	32	30
Protested	19	20	19	21	20
Occupied building	1	2	2	3	3
N	2249	5400	5044	4617	2806

(NZES data, taken from Vowles (2004) and www.nzes.org)

These results do not clearly support arguments that a shift in participation is occurring in New Zealand, particularly as voter turnout over the same period is generally higher than the numbers for the leading form of alternative participation. However, whilst voter turnout is declining, these results show that in New Zealand participation in non traditional methods is either stable or increasing.

In relation to Youth -

The impact of these developments to democracy and participation on the political behaviour of young people also deserves particular attention. Not only is this because young people appear to be increasingly less inclined to turn out and vote at elections, it is also the behaviour of younger generations that is the most insightful for determining the future of electoral turnout and participation within a nation. The importance of this for New Zealand is acknowledged by Hayward (2006), who argues that voter turnout is likely to decrease further as the population changes and younger New Zealanders reach voting age (Hayward, 2006: 521).

A significant amount of research has shown that the latest generation to reach voting age, Generation Y, is turning out less than older generations (Delli Carpini, 2000; O'Neill, 2001, 2007; Blais *et al*, 2002; Milner, 2005, 2008; Chareka & Sears, 2006). Although the current trends of turnout decline are found across all age groups, it is young people who feature most prominently amongst those not voting. This in itself is not a new phenomenon, as overtime younger people have consistently been found to be those less likely to vote. As a result, non-voting has traditionally been associated with age, as it was seen to be a behaviour that young people would 'grow out of' later in life. This explanation, known as the life-cycle effect, has dominated work on non-voting for decades. However, recent research has called in to question the validity of life-cycle explanations for youth non-voting, and instead generational explanations are growing in popularity and strength. These studies have shown that, when comparing the voting behaviour of young people across decades, Generation Y are voting significantly less than the same age cohorts of previous generations (Blais *et al*, 2002, 2004; Hein, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005; Milner, 2005). Similar analysis in relation to New Zealand has also found support for generational arguments, as "a person born in 1970 and after is about 22 per cent less likely to vote than a person born in 1933 or earlier" (Vowles, 2004: 17). The realisation that today's young people are less inclined to vote, coupled with evidence that this behaviour may not change as they age, has only added to the concerns that exist about the current health of democracy within many nations.

There is a common perception that by not voting, young people are disengaging from wider public life. Terms such as 'Generation Why Bother' (Langesen, 2008) are used to

describe this young generation, fuelling the perceptions of politically apathetic youth. However, research shows that many young people are interested in politics and are participating politically, although through less traditional means, and are often more likely to do so than older generations. These more positive trends have led researchers to create terms such as ‘engaged sceptics’ to describe these politically interested young people (Henn, Weinstein & Wring (2002). These non-traditional methods of participation, as discussed previously, include signing petitions, involvement in boycotts and attending protests. Specific research detailing the levels of participation by young people from countries including New Zealand and Australia are outlined in Chapter Three of this thesis. The data provided by the surveys and interviews used in these research projects confirm the theories that are proposed in the literature.

One of these core arguments is that young people in particular are disillusioned with the current forms of representative democracy and traditional politics (Norris, 2002, 2003; O’Neill, 2007). It is believed that this disillusionment has led to today’s young people being less willing than previous generations to “channel their political energies through traditional agencies” (Norris, 2002: 222). Instead, young people are seen as leading the transformation of political participation and expression towards less conventional methods, as they are more likely to express themselves politically through a variety of means (Norris, 2002). With the support of empirical research, these theories demonstrate that young people are not indifferent to politics, as they are showing significant levels of engagement in non-traditional activities (O’Neill, 2007). These findings offer a different perspective to the low levels of voter turnout of young people, as they show that rather than being apathetic, young people are choosing to engage differently than previous generations.

The concerns and changes with democracy, voting and political participation discussed above have all contributed to a political environment where voting patterns are no longer as stable as they once were and, for many democracies, electoral turnout is in decline. The contemporary realities of democracy as a political system have highlighted some of its weaknesses, leaving many of the ideals open to scrutiny. Factors which were once reliable, such as trust in authority, the popularity of political parties, and confidence in voting as a method of participation, all appear to be weakening. However, despite evidence of declining turnout, changes to political loyalties, questions about the merits of democracy in contemporary systems, and even claims of democracy being in a state of crisis, democracy

remains dominant. Nevertheless, things are changing and affecting the way citizens, representatives, governments, and democracy interact. Voters seem less willing to follow broad ideological leanings when making electoral decisions and instead, the saliency of individual issues can often determine election outcomes. As a result of increasing access to education and information, levels of political sophistication have risen and citizens have been given the tools to better analyse, criticise and hold to account their political representatives. People are choosing to participate in different ways, with research showing that as electoral turnout declines, participation in non-traditional forms of activity is increasing.

While many of these developments have raised fears for the future of democracy, a popular trend within the literature focuses on the positive effect that this can have on the quality of democracy in these nations. This approach argues that these changing attitudes and behaviour of citizens within representative democracies can be interpreted positively for the health of democracy and government, as they represent citizens taking an active interest in the politics of their nation (Inglehart, 1997; Narud & Aalberg, 1999; Norris, 1999; Dalton, 2002). This argument sees citizens critically analysing, rather than passively accepting, the perceived distance between many of the ideals of democracy and the reality presented to them through modern representative democracies. Furthermore, these feelings of disenchantment and disillusionment present an opportunity for development and change and a challenge to governments and representatives to embrace a more democratic style of decision-making.

Voting Theories -

*“Voters have too many pressing tasks, from making money to making love,
to follow the arcane procedures of government”*

- Gerald Pomper (1988: 259)

As was discussed in the introduction and demonstrated in many electoral studies, voting turnout throughout Western democracies has been experiencing a general decline over recent years. An even greater concern for these democracies is the significance of age in this

turnout decline, as younger generations disproportionately feature as those who are not voting. In trying to understand these patterns of inconsistency and decline in election turnout, the reasons behind an individual citizen's decision to vote, or not, has become an important area of research. The study of voting behaviour is a relatively new field of research, as until the early twentieth century "there are virtually no examples of studies of voting behaviour *per se*" (Evans, 2004: 21). A range of explanations have been offered to account for the behaviour of potential voters and to help clarify the variances in electoral turnout within individual countries from election to election.

Recent work by Franklin (2004) on voter turnout in established democracies provides an overview of the leading voting theories within the literature, some of which emerged long before the current concerns for electoral participation developed. These theories range from explanations focusing on the individual voter to those relating to the specific circumstances of a particular election. Whilst focusing on motivations behind the act of voting, these theories also address non-voting and subsequently add to discussions of declining turnout. The theories introduced by Franklin (2004), as well as some important omissions, are all briefly discussed below with reference to non-voting, New Zealand elections, and their relevancy to the current debates around turnout decline and the health of democracy.

Electoral Context

Literature looking at the relevance of the nature of an election to the levels of voter turnout was dominant in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly during the 1920s (Merriam & Gosnell, 1924; Gosnell 1927; Boechel; 1928; Tingsten, 1937). This time period represents the earliest studies of political behaviour within Western democracies (Norris, 2007) and is characterised by a focus on the characteristics of a particular election, such as the politicians involved and the issues discussed. Boechel (1928), for example, believed that high voter turnout was reliant on how competitive a specific election was and whether "issues of vital concern are presented" (1928: 517). At this early point in the study of elections and voter turnout, the attitudes of the citizens towards voting itself were not explored and, as Franklin (2004) surmises, "low voter turnout would have been blamed on the character of the election, not on the characters of those who failed to vote" (2004: 2).

When this explanation of voter turnout is applied to New Zealand elections, some relationships can be identified. For example, the highest official turnout, at 93.7 per cent, occurred in 1984, which was a particularly important election based on its specific characteristics. The 1984 election was a ‘snap’ election, called amidst a period of extreme social and economic pressure, including record highs in unemployment and inflation. Similarly, voter turnout rose again at the 1996 election, which was New Zealand’s first using the new electoral system, MMP, which was accordingly an important and exciting election. Using the same theory in terms of low voter turnout in New Zealand, the 2002 and 2008 elections provide a convincing argument for this approach. These elections represent the lowest turnout in 100 years, 77 per cent and 79.5 per cent respectively, and were both characterised by relatively low levels of competition due to generally held perceptions of a clear winner in each.

Another interesting example, which had a particular impact on youth turnout, was in 2005. By promising to make student loans interest-free if elected, the Labour Party were able to mobilise young people and gain support from many who had previously been seen as non-voters (Arseneau, 2008). Although electoral explanations can be successfully applied to voter turnout in New Zealand, and despite the popularity of this theory during the early period of voter studies, it is the individual level explanations, focusing on the “character” (Franklin, 2004: 2) of those who vote or not, and the reasons behind their decision, that have become popular and are more aligned with this research on individual non-voter behaviour.

Rational Choice Theory

Theories focusing on the characteristics of the individual, rather than an election, have tended to dominate contemporary theories of voter behaviour and turnout. Continuing with the timeline offered by Franklin (2004), voting studies of the 1950s and 1960s were led by rational choice theory, an approach that significantly changed the way voting behaviour was perceived, and one which has continued to dominate voting studies (Evans, 2004). This economic based theory, when used in relation to voting turnout, analyses an individual’s perception of the costs of voting and the prospect of their one vote making a difference to the outcome of an election (Downs, 1957; Thompson, 1970; Verba *et al*, 1995; Blais & Young,

1999; Evans, 2004; Mulgan, 2004; Engelen, 2006; Caplan, 2007). Developing from Downs' (1957) 'An Economic Theory of Democracy', rational choice theory considers a potential voter as a rational, self-interested consumer, who will utilise a cost-benefit analysis when approaching the act of voting. Within this theory, it is most commonly electoral aspects such as the competitiveness and proportionality of the election, which can help to determine voter turnout (Sheerin, 2007: 13).

This approach, when used in relation to non-voting, sees abstention as a rational action when the costs of voting are high or at least slightly higher than the returns (Downs, 1957: 274). However, it is generally accepted that the probability of an individual vote being able to impact the outcome of an election is extremely low, and as a result the returns from voting are also low, implying that the costs of voting will almost certainly outweigh the benefits. This situation exemplifies 'the paradox of voting', a term which illustrates the complexity of this theory, given that most people do still vote despite the perceived irrationality of the action when approached by this cost-benefit analysis (Bendor *et al.*, 2003; Evans, 2004; Feddersen, 2004; Mulgan, 2004; Engelen, 2006). As an explanation for abstention or non-voting, rational choice theory offers a strong and straightforward argument and is accordingly prevalent within abstention literature. However, as Downs (1957) states, "we do not take into consideration the whole personality of each individual...the complexity of his motives, the way in which every part of his life is intimately related to his emotional needs" (1957: 7). This leaves rational choice theory lacking when looking to understand the true motivations behind an individual's decisions and behaviour, as this thesis attempts.

Franklin (2004) concludes his timeline by discussing a group of voting theories which grew out of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and have continued to direct studies to this day. These theories deviate from those previously discussed, as their focus is on determining and understanding the aspects of an individuals' character that influence their voting behaviour. Franklin (2004) specifies the 'resource model', the 'mobilization model', and 'socialization theory' as significant contributions to this period, which saw voting theories evolve towards focusing on the character and motivations of an individual. These theories are now discussed, as well as 'efficacy' theory, which is not included in the overview by Franklin (2004), but offers important insights into voter behaviour. This broad area of theories focuses on the demographic, social and psychological characteristics of an individual citizen as a base in determining voting behaviour (Green & Shachar, 2000). By exploring electoral behaviour

based on these specific and more individual criteria, these voting theories offer an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the particular motivations behind the acts of voting and non-voting.

Resource Model

The ‘resource model’, also known as the ‘baseline model’ or the ‘standard socioeconomic model’, explains voting behaviour in the context of an individual’s income, occupation, and education (Verba & Nie, 1987). Franklin (1996) describes this model as focusing on “what people individually bring to the democratic process: knowledge, wealth, and time” (1996: 219). Work by Verba (Almond & Verba, 1963; Verba & Nie, 1987) leads this area of research, which argues that an individual’s propensity towards participation is determined by their social status and level of education. It is argued that these factors, “mediated by the intervening effect of their civic attitudes” (Verba & Nie, 1987: 14), which includes an individual’s sense of efficacy and feeling of obligation towards voting, will explain whether someone will vote or not. This argument is widely expressed in the literature, with the influence of higher levels of socioeconomic status and education thought to be strongly related to higher levels of turnout (Verba *et al*, 1995; Evans, 2004; Franklin, 2004). Many studies also support these assertions, confirming the relevancy of education level, in particular, to voting behaviour.

Higher education is argued to provide individuals with the confidence and ability to be more “capable of engaging with political discourse” (Evans, 2004: 154). These skills are thought to encourage voting (Franklin, 2004). However, turnout levels have decreased over recent decades as the availability and popularity of higher education has increased (Gray & Caul, 2000). Whilst support for the resource model is widespread, the added complexity that authors such as Dalton (2002) bring to this theory deserves attention. Dalton’s (2002) work on cognitive mobilisation, as previously discussed, demonstrates that the greater access to education and information has prepared citizens for dealing with politics, but instead of encouraging traditional means of participation, it is argued that his knowledge is empowering many citizens to participate outside of voting.

Mobilisation Model

The mobilisation model looks at the effect of membership in organisations, involvement in society, and the efforts of political parties, on voter behaviour. As well as the importance of factors such as age and education on electoral turnout, the extent to which citizens are “embedded in social structures” (Franklin, 2004: 16) is argued to have a strong impact on voting. This is because individuals involved in or members of groups and organisations, including churches and unions, are considered to be easier to mobilise and therefore more likely to vote. Many groups and organisations undertake a mobilising role at election time by “contacting, educating, and reminding their members of the importance of their vote” (Gray & Caul, 2000: 1100). Involvement in these facets of society is thought to bring individuals closer to the political process by reinforcing their interest in participation and encourage a feeling of social integration (Evans, 2004). Similarly, mobilisation by groups, political parties and the media is argued to give individuals a heightened awareness of their role in society, which includes participating politically through voting (Franklin, 2002).

The relationship between mobilisation and non-voting is equally as important. Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) argue that one of the key reasons why people do not participate is because ‘nobody asked’, which implies that they are “outside of the recruitment networks that bring people into politics” (1995: 269). Young people in particular are thought to be affected by this as they are often yet to be mobilised or have the social linkages that encourage voting (Franklin, 2004). To a large extent, the declining turnout of recent decades is argued to be “the product of systematic deteriorations of the mobilisation of peripheral voters” (Gray & Caul, 2000: 1092). Declining membership in political parties, as well as the decreasing number of those involved in unions, churches, and social groups in countries including New Zealand, has led to fears of widespread disengagement (Putnam, 2000; Vowles, 2004). As well as declining involvement in these organisations and society in general, the voting age population within many industrialised democracies is growing, meaning that those most difficult to mobilise, the “unorganized interests” (Gray & Caul, 2000), are an increasingly large group.

Socialization Theory

A further approach to understanding voting behaviour on an individual level is socialization theory, which focuses on voting as a habit that is learned during a citizen's formative years (Franklin, 2004). The main thesis of the socialization argument is that political attitudes and behaviour are established early in life, and will remain relatively stable over time (Sheerin, 2007). Early socialization theory of the 1960s focused on the family, school and other authority agents, such as the church, as the 'socialization agents', or those with the greatest influence on young people (Torney-Purta, 2000). These agents were thought to instil their beliefs and interests on young people in order to develop certain attitudes, values and behaviours. At this time, the socialization theorists took it for granted that the values and influences within a societal group would be homogenous and reinforce each other, as well as assuming that the young people would not be resistant to the 'socialization message' (Torney-Purta, 2000). However, socialization theory has since developed to take in to account the plurality and diversity of influences. The number of potential agents involved in a child's political development has been expanded to include influences such as the media, friends, and new social movements (Sheerin, 2007). Similarly, the variety of perspectives offered by socialization agents is now considered, as is the potential for a young person's own predispositions to influence how messages are interpreted (Torney-Purta, 2000).

Research into the effects of political socialization on declining voter turnout in industrial democracies has found an important association (Blais *et al*, 2004; Franklin, 2004; Hooghe, 2004). Franklin (2004) concluded that "by far the most powerful effect is that of young initiation" (2004: 190) and that political socialization "bears more responsibility for turnout decline than any other" (2004: 190). These findings show an interrelation between socialization theory and the electoral context approach, as those cohorts that had a distinctive experience of elections during their formative years exhibited a different pattern of behaviour throughout adulthood (Franklin, 2004). For example, Franklin (2004) found that competitiveness was a particular influence, meaning that those that had been exposed to a competitive election at some point could retain the motivation to vote that this encouraged, even if elections were no longer as competitive. From this research, the importance of the socialization theory is acknowledged, stating that "political behaviour evidently has much in

common with other types of behaviour, and individuals are held to learn their political orientations from the orientations of those around them” (Franklin, 2004: 21).

Efficacy

The study of efficacy and its influence on voting behaviour, although consistently prominent, is currently experiencing renewed popularity. Efficacy is one factor within the ‘psychological model’ of approaching voter behaviour, which also includes partisan dealignment and political interest (Sheerin, 2007). Political efficacy was first identified by Campbell, Gurin and Miller (1954) in ‘The Voter Decides’, a detailed analysis of the 1952 American Presidential election. Political efficacy was defined as “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e. that it is worthwhile to perform one’s civic duties” (Campbell *et al*, 1954: 187). The concept of political efficacy has since been developed to differentiate between internal and external efficacy. Leading work on the measurement of efficacy by Miller *et al*. (1980) defines internal efficacy as what “indicates individuals’ self-perceptions that they are capable of understanding politics and competent enough to participate in political acts such as voting” (1980: 253). In comparison, external efficacy is defined as what “measures expressed beliefs about political institutions” (Miller *et al*, 1980: 253), meaning that a lack of external efficacy “indicates the belief that the public cannot influence political outcomes because government leaders and institutions are unresponsive” (Miller *et al*, 1980: 253). The concept of political efficacy is argued to be “at the heart of many explanations of citizen activity and involvement” (Verba *et al*, 1995: 346) and has been proven as “a strong predictor” (Verba *et al*, 1995: 346) of this behaviour.

As an explanation of voter behaviour, efficacy levels are particularly relevant for this thesis. Recent work by Sheerin (2007) that looked at efficacy as an explanation for the voting behaviour of young New Zealanders was the stimulus for this research, as some of her results were inconsistent with traditional expectations of efficacy theory. Whilst high levels of efficacy and voter turnout are thought to have a positive relationship, Sheerin (2007) found that young people could demonstrate high levels of internal efficacy, in particular, but still not vote. This led Sheerin (2007) to suggest postmaterialism as an alternative explanation for

the behaviour of these non-voters, which is what is being explored here. Efficacy levels in New Zealand have also been studied more generally in relation to the change of electoral system to MMP in 1996. Efficacy levels were surveyed over a period of years before and after 1996 using questions based on the indicators of efficacy; interest in politics, the feeling that your vote counts, and whether politics is complicated. The researchers found that the change to the PR system “had succeeded initially in fostering more positive attitudes about the efficacy of voting” (Karp & Banducci, 1999: 363). These results were believed to be influenced not only by the more responsive and representative nature of MMP, but also because citizens had been empowered through their involvement in the referenda process that had instigated the change.

Postmaterialist Theory -

“...prolonged prosperity and the welfare state contribute to an increasingly widespread sense that survival can be taken for granted”

- Ronald Inglehart (1997: 209)

Developing on the outline of voting theories above, it is necessary to explore postmaterialist theory, particularly in light of the conclusions made by Sheerin (2007) on young New Zealanders and internal efficacy. Postmaterialist theory not only offers an interesting perspective to declining turnout, it also seeks to address many of the developments to democracy and participation that have been discussed previously. The essence of postmaterialist theory argues that there has been a fundamental shift in value priorities within recent generations, primarily as a result of the unprecedented levels of economic security in most industrial societies following World War II. This ‘intergenerational value change’ has arguably seen the primary value concerns of citizens, particularly within the youngest generations, evolve from ‘materialist’ values, which focus on economic security, to ‘postmaterialist’ values, which emphasise self-expression and quality of life (Inglehart, 1997: 4). For Inglehart, the move toward postmaterialist goals is the “best documented component” (Inglehart, 1997: 5) of a broad cultural change from ‘Modernization’ to ‘Postmodernization’, which he argues is being experienced throughout industrial nations. Postmodernization is

described as the new prevailing worldview that “reflects a shift in what people want out of life” (Inglehart, 1997: 8) in areas from politics and work, to religion and sexual behaviour. This shift is also closely related to the emergence of a new style of citizen politics, brought about by “increased demands for more active public participation in the policy making process through direct action, new social movements, and protest groups” (Norris, 2002: 19).

Ronald Inglehart (1977, 1981, 1997, 2008) has led discussion on the influence of value change and postmaterialism on industrial societies, and his work has been described as “the most fruitful attempt to draw plausible conclusions from these social and political changes” (Crewe, 1985: 5). The importance of studying citizen values and value change is explained by Dalton (2002), who describes values as providing “the standards that guide the attitudes and behaviours of the public [that] signify a preference for certain personal and societal goals, as well as the methods to obtain these goals” (2002: 78). A significant force behind Inglehart’s arguments is data collected from the World Values Survey (WVS), which has tracked changes in the attitudes and values of citizens from around the world periodically since 1981. Methodology and results of the WVS are discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Inglehart (2008) maintains that the economic security experienced throughout industrial democracies has allowed more and more people to ‘take survival for granted’, which leads to a reassessment of one’s primary goals. This theory is based on the Maslowian argument of a ‘needs hierarchy’ (Maslow, 1954), in which “people seek to fulfil their most basic needs (psychological and material) before they can adopt values that are linked to non-materialist and more ideal interests” (Narud & Aalberg, 1999: 28).

Inglehart’s theory of value change is based upon two arguments; the *scarcity hypothesis* and the *socialisation hypothesis*. The scarcity hypothesis, much like the Maslowian approach, maintains that individuals “place the greatest value on those things that are in relatively short supply” (Inglehart, 1981: 881). As a result, if the supply increases to meet demands, then the item is taken for granted and focus moves to something that remains scarce (Dalton, 2002). Inglehart’s second hypothesis draws on the key premises of modern socialisation theory, recognising the influence of family and wider political and economic concerns of society on an individual during their formative years. Of particular importance is an individual’s feeling of security, shaped by both the economic realities and subjective perceptions at that time (Inglehart, 2008). The relevance of this for Inglehart is his belief that “to a large extent, one’s value priorities reflect the conditions that prevailed during one’s

preadult years” (Inglehart, 1981: 881). By combining these two hypotheses, Inglehart (2008) concludes that value priorities are formed during an individual’s formative years based on the goals that are in short supply at that time, and that these value priorities will tend to persist over time despite any societal changes.

Inglehart (2008) uses the premises outlined above as the foundation for his argument that industrial societies are experiencing a shift in value priorities towards postmaterialist goals. He argues that this shift is occurring because of fundamentally different economic and social conditions since World War II, and that the unprecedented levels of prosperity experienced by the ‘post-war cohorts’ has led to very different priorities between older and younger generations (Inglehart, 2008). Improvement in the existential conditions of many of these younger generations has allowed their priorities to evolve from materialist goals towards postmaterialist goals. Inglehart (2008) argues that this shift has seen the need for belonging, esteem, and intellectual and self-expression become more prominent, as economic needs are fulfilled.

This emphasis on postmaterialist goals is said to have far-reaching implications, particularly politically, given the relationship between these values and areas including political participation, and support for new issues and new types of political parties. Dalton (2000) argues that postmaterialists are “calling for a new participatory style of politics” (2000: 255). Inglehart believes that postmaterialist values emphasise self-expression and participation over respect for authority, encouraging a more “elite-challenging, issue-oriented, and direct form of democracy...more genuine democracy” (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005: 43). This includes a shift from voting to more “spontaneous, issue-specific, and elite-challenging forms of civic action” (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005: 44). Inglehart (2008) argues that this shift towards an emphasis on postmaterialist goals has occurred gradually throughout industrial democracies over previous decades and is the reason behind the concerns for voter turnout and the health of democracy. Furthermore, Inglehart (2008) maintains that these trends will continue as post-war generations replace older generations. The relevancy of postmaterialist theory to current democratic trends, including voter decline, as well as its emphasis on younger generations, makes it an important and interesting approach for the focus of this thesis.

Conclusion -

This chapter has outlined the important work within the relevant literature, focusing on the changing perceptions towards democracy, participation and voting. These trends have proven to be widespread, with significant implications for the functioning of democratic institutions and practices within many industrialised nations. This chapter has also discussed the leading voting theories, with the aim of developing a basis for understanding why young principled non-voters do not vote. The focus of this thesis now turns to recent studies on postmaterialism and youth participation from New Zealand and around the world to better understand the political behaviour and attitudes of young people.

Chapter Three: Youth Participation in a Comparative Perspective

Introduction -

“What we need is either less corruption or more chance to participate in it”

- Oscar Wilde

The participation of young people in the political process is an increasingly important and popular area of research. This thesis focuses on three particular aspects of this relationship. Firstly, the political participation of young people is important as it is part of a wider context of change occurring in many industrial democracies, which includes voter decline and changing attitudes towards democracy. Within this, research has shown that young people are often disproportionately represented amongst those not voting. Secondly, it is important to understand why this is happening and explore the motivations behind young non-voters. In particular it is interesting to explore whether apathy, as is widely discussed, is behind the numbers of young people not voting, or whether this behaviour is a part of a wider movement towards better democracy. Finally, understanding youth participation becomes important in order to ascertain whether this behaviour is symptomatic of generational or life-cycle trends, which is vital in understanding the future health of democracies.

Postmaterialist theory provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding this situation because of its attention to the relationships between young people, participation and democracy. The question this thesis asks is whether postmaterialist theory is an influence on the attitudes and behaviour of young non-voters in New Zealand. It is important to note that within this question it is only a portion of young non-voters, ‘principled non-voters’, that are being discussed. The term and definition of ‘principled non-voters’ is taken from work by Sheerin (2007), which is outlined below. By focusing on this sub-group of young non-voters and trying to understand their political motivations and behaviour, it is hoped that this

research can help broaden the perceptions of young non-voters beyond that of a politically apathetic generation.

Very little research has been done on any potential relationship between postmaterialist theory and young non-voters in New Zealand. This chapter details how the issues of postmaterialism, youth non-voting and youth participation have been addressed in recent studies and literature both internationally and in New Zealand. The chapter begins with an outline of the most relevant pieces of research to this thesis, which specifically discuss postmaterialist theory in relation to young non-voters in New Zealand. Work by Sheerin (2007) and research from the New Zealand Electoral Commission (2008) identify different types of young non-voters, many of which move beyond the generalised perceptions of apathetic youth. Included in both of these typologies of non-voters are ‘principled non-voters’, described as those who have made a principled choice not to participate politically through voting, and postmaterialist theory is offered as a potential explanation for this behaviour.

This chapter then expands to discuss the ways that postmaterialism and youth non-voting are studied individually, given the limited amount of research specific to the relationship between postmaterialist theory and young non-voters in New Zealand¹⁴. Firstly, the ways that postmaterialism is studied, both internationally and in New Zealand, is looked at. This is done primarily by focusing on the World Values Survey (WVS), which is a large research project led by Ronald Inglehart that measures changes in our values over time. The general findings of the WVS will be presented, as well as New Zealand’s specific results from the WVS. Further literature relating to postmaterialism and changing values within New Zealand will also be discussed.

Following from the specific discussion of postmaterialist theory, broader studies concerning youth participation from New Zealand and other democracies including Britain and Canada are outlined. These pieces of research highlight the issues related to youth participation that have arisen within the relevant literature and electoral results from their

¹⁴ The relationship between postmaterialism and young people’s political attitudes and behaviour has been studied internationally. For example, Theocaris (2009) explores the influence of postmaterialist theory on the online and offline political activity of Greek youth. His research found that there is a trend by young Greek’s towards a postmaterialist orientation, which is accompanied by a large disinterest in traditional forms of participation. This research also found a positive correlation between postmaterialism and internet use including online ‘extra-institutional activity’.

countries. They also explore the political behaviour of young people through going to the source and actually talking with young people. This research is commonly carried out by government agencies or youth-focused organisations with concerns about the current trends of, and perceptions about, youth participation. Although these studies are not directly related to postmaterialist theory, many of the findings and conclusions of the research are very closely aligned the main arguments of postmaterialism. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the specific focus of this thesis, based around a set of research question that will also be outlined.

Young Non-voters in New Zealand -

Research specific to the relationship between postmaterialism and young non-voters in New Zealand is very limited. Where it can be found is within classifications of young non-voters, but simply as a suggested explanation of the motivations behind a specific type of non-voter. This particular type of non-voter, young ‘principled non-voters’, has become the focus of this thesis, with the relevancy of postmaterialist theory, as suggested, being tested. There are two recent pieces of research in New Zealand which have identified young principled non-voters as a particular type of non-voter, and these are discussed below.

Young New Zealanders and Efficacy

Within her qualitative study of the validity of efficacy theory for explaining the attitudes and behaviour of young voters and non-voters in New Zealand, Sheerin (2007) identifies three categories of young non-voters from her focus groups and interviews: ‘disinterested’, ‘inconvenienced’ and ‘principled’. Simply put, the ‘disinterested’ non-voters relate their reasons for not voting to a lack of interest in politics and a belief that a single vote cannot make a difference (Sheerin, 2007: 89). Most of the young people interviewed by Sheerin (2007), who she identified as ‘inconvenienced’ non-voters, showed an interest in politics but did not vote “due to perceived barriers to voting or issues of inconvenience” (Sheerin, 2007: 89). Finally, and of most interest here, was the one non-voter who identified

his decision not to vote as a principled choice and was accordingly labelled a ‘principled non-voter’ (Sheerin, 2007: 94). This principled non-voter displayed a high level of interest in politics and felt that politics was relevant and easy to understand, yet chose not to vote. These characteristics of this non-voter are particularly interesting as they counter many of the perceptions or assumptions about politics and young people.

What is particularly interesting about Sheerin’s (2007) findings is the belief of the principled non-voter that “young people can be more politically effective through alternative means of participation” (2007: 94) and in the power of non-voting as a political statement. It is these aspects, coupled with the relatively high levels of internal and external efficacy that this non-voter demonstrated, that led Sheerin (2007) to suggest postmaterialism as offering “an apt account of some of the influences of ‘principled’ non-voters” (2007: 105). Interest in politics and a preference for alternative means of political participation are closely related to some of the key influences of postmaterialism on political participation.

This research draws attention to a perspective of youth participation that has often been neglected in the literature, as it demonstrates that the traditional expectations of the relationship between interest in politics and political participation may need exploring. Although the principled non-voter interviewed by Sheerin (2007) is in the obvious minority of the young non-voters in her study, his opinions and behaviour prompted this research. The values expressed by the principled non-voter represent an interesting area of research, as it is important to understand the motivations behind young non-voters who have made an active decision not to vote. The purpose of this thesis is to further explore the ideas put forward in Sheerin’s (2007) work by interviewing young non-voters with similar attitudes and behaviour to her principled non-voter in order to better understand their motivations, as well as to test the influence of postmaterialism as suggested.

Typologies of Young Non-voters in New Zealand

Prior to the 2008 general election, research was conducted for the New Zealand Electoral Commission (NZEC) with the key research aims of exploring political literacy levels amongst young non-voters, the culture of non-voting and the ways these attitudes and

habits are formed and developed (NZEC, 2008a:1). From the interviews with young non-voters, five categories of non-voters were identified “based on their motivation, knowledge and attitudes towards politics and elections” (NZEC, 2008a: 1). These categories were: ‘confident and convinced’, who held similar attitudes to those identified as ‘inconvenienced’ non-voters by Sheerin (2007); ‘tentative triers’, who appeared to suffer from a lack of confidence in their ability to participate politically; ‘living for the weekend’, who do not believe that voting is important for them right now; ‘politically disinterested’, for whom not voting is a deeply entrenched behaviour and feel that voting would not make any difference to their lives; and finally those described as ‘distrustful and disillusioned’, who exhibit many similarities to Sheerin’s (2007) principled non-voter (NZEC, 2008a: 5-8). The ‘distrustful and disillusioned’ young non-voters were those who had made a conscious decision not to vote as a part of their rejection of the political system as a whole (NZEC, 2008a: 7). These non-voters exhibited frustration with the current political situation, yet held strong beliefs that nothing would change, as well as showing a lack of trust of those in power.

The Electoral Commission presented their research in public meetings during an election year road-show in 2008, with the goal of highlighting the problem of declining voter turnout amongst young people. The presentation discussed the research findings detailed above, including the categories of young non-voters, as well as describing some specific examples of young voters and non-voters (NZEC, 2008b). One of these examples was a principled non-voter, who clearly fit into their ‘distrustful and disillusioned’ category of young non-voters and was comparable to the principled non-voter discovered by Sheerin (2007). The principled non-voter described by the Electoral Commission felt that voting would not change things and that there were more effective ways to make a difference than voting (NZEC, 2008b). This non-voter also believed that politics was now increasingly global (NZEC, 2008b). These references to globalisation and alternative means of political participation, as well as the non-voter’s confidence in their own understanding of politics and their belief that the issues of most importance were not being addressed by the New Zealand government, are all consistent with postmaterialist arguments for not voting.

The descriptions of young non-voters presented in this research offer a valuable overview of the different motivations behind non-voting among youth and demonstrate the complexities of this issue. The inclusion of the ‘distrustful and disillusioned’ group of non-

voters and the specific reference to principled non-voters in this study are consistent with Sheerin's (2007) findings and is encouraging for further research in this area.

Postmaterialism -

Research and studies on postmaterialism have been led by Ronald Inglehart, who is a prominent academic on politics and values and is the current President of the World Values Survey (WVS). Inglehart's index for understanding postmaterialism has become "the most widely used and replicated measure of postmaterialism" (Davis & Davenport, 1999: 650). It is used worldwide in academic literature and national election surveys, as well being a fundamental part of the WVS. The index is based on a respondent's answers to questions about broad societal goals for their nation, rather than the immediate needs of the individual (Inglehart, 1997). By asking participants to make their choices from the index, it allows researchers to understand and "identify which goals take priority in the public's mind when values come in conflict" (Dalton, 2002: 82). Originally, the measurement of postmaterialist values relied on a four-item index, although this was expanded in 1995 by Abramson and Inglehart to a twelve-item index made up of three sets of questions. These indices are outlined below in Table 3.1.

In order to explain Inglehart's ideas, the twelve-item index detailed in Table 3.1 will be used as an example. Six of the goals are intended to emphasise survival needs, based on economic and physical security ('materialist'), whereas the remaining six emphasise self-expression goals ('postmaterialist'). In relation to the first of the three questions, answers (1) and (2) are considered in line with materialist thought, whereas if answers (3) and (4) are chosen the participant is considered to be postmaterialist. For the second question, answers (1) and (3) are materialist and answers (2) and (4) are postmaterialist. Finally, for the third question, answers (1) and (4) are materialist and answers (2) and (3) are postmaterialist. Results from the twelve-item index are explained by a scale of 0-5, which is based on the number of postmaterialist goals the participant chooses¹⁵. When using the four-item index,

¹⁵ The 0-5 scale is based on the number of postmaterialist answers an individual gives, presuming that there are only five postmaterialist values to choose from across the twelve items. The goal 'trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful' is not included because it has been found to have differing associations in different

participants are classified as ‘materialist’, ‘postmaterialist’, or ‘mixed’.¹⁶ The use of these questions as a measure of value change has gained criticism; however, these indices have become the standard test for assessing postmaterialism and value change within societies.

Table 3.1: Inglehart’s Materialist/Postmaterialist Indices¹⁷

<p>Original four-item index:</p> <p>- “For a nation, it is not always possible to obtain everything one might wish...Several different goals are listed. If you had to choose among them, which one seems most desirable to you?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintaining order in the nation 2. Giving the people more say in important political decisions 3. Fighting rising prices 4. Protecting freedom of speech <p>...Which one would be your second choice?”</p> <p>Current twelve-item index:</p> <p>- “People sometimes talk about what the aims of this country should be for the next ten years. On this card are listed some of the goals which different people would give top priority. Would you please say which one of these you, yourself, consider the most important?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A high level of economic growth 2. Making sure this country has strong defence forces 3. Seeing that people have more say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities 4. Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful <p>....And which would be the next most important?”</p> <p>- “If you had to choose, which one of the things on this card would you say is most important?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintaining order in the nation 2. Giving people more say in important government decisions 3. Fighting rising prices 4. Protecting freedom of speech <p>...And which would be the next most important?”</p> <p>- “Here is another list. In your opinion, which one of these is most important?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A stable economy 2. Progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society 3. Progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money 4. The fight against crime <p>...And what would be the next most important?”</p>

societies that are linked to both materialist and postmaterialist values. An individual is classified as ‘materialist’ if they choose no postmaterialist goals, ‘postmaterialist’ if they choose all five postmaterialist goals, and the remainder are classified as 1, 2, 3 or 4 (Inglehart, 1997).

¹⁶ An individual is ‘materialist’ if both first and second choices are materialist, ‘postmaterialist’ if both responses are postmaterialist, and ‘mixed’ if the participant selects one materialist answer and one postmaterialist answer (Inglehart, 1997).

¹⁷ (Four-item index taken from Davis & Davenport, 1999: 650; Twelve-item index taken from 2005 WVS questionnaire – www.worldvaluessurvey.org)

Work by Davis and Davenport (1999) provides a comprehensive overview of the main criticisms of these indices. The authors assess the validity of Inglehart's postmaterialism measurement through a comprehensive overview of relevant literature, as well as by conducting comparisons between studies of postmaterialism. Their critique of Inglehart focuses on three issues. Firstly, Davis and Davenport (1999) question the validity of explaining cultural change across societies at a country-level, when the purpose of the index is to measure individual-level value orientations. Secondly, the authors test the randomness of responses to the index and find that the results do not differ significantly from what would be expected by chance. The authors also discuss the importance that the saliency of different issues at particular times, as certain conditions within a nation would undoubtedly affect the priority an individual would place on relevant values. Finally, the authors explore the attitudinal and behavioural correlates of the classifications in the index and question whether these are related to distinctive values and attitudes. Their findings show that participants are often "simply responding as best they can to the alternatives offered in the survey, without necessarily demonstrating any commitment to a particular underlying value orientation" (Davis & Davenport, 1999: 663).

World Values Survey (WVS)

The World Values Survey (WVS) is conducted by a network of social scientists with the goal of studying changing values and their effect on social and political life. In conjunction with the European Values Study, the WVS has carried out four waves of national surveys involving 97 societies. It is currently in the process of undertaking its fifth wave, which will provide the WVS with a 30-year time series for analysing social and political change. Through these national studies, the WVS collects comprehensive data on 'all major areas of human concern' including politics, religion, the economy, and social life. There is a root questionnaire used as the base for all countries involved, which covers a broad range of issues and includes the materialism/postmaterialism measures discussed previously. Individual countries can deviate slightly from the main survey by adding country-specific details, and there are also differences for OECD and non-OECD countries.

Analysis of the resulting data has found correlations between many of the basic values, which are explained through two dimensions of cross-cultural variation: Traditional/Secular-rational values and Survival/Self-expression values (Inglehart, 2006). The first dimension represents the contrast between societies where religion is very important and those societies where it is not. The contrast between these societies also becomes evident through differing preferences on a range of issues including abortion, family values and national pride. An important trend reported by the WVS is a shift in worldviews in nearly all industrial societies towards secular-rational values. Similarly, the rise of the knowledge society from the industrial society is argued to have directed a shift from survival values to self-expression values. It is this shift that is at the core of postmaterialist thought. As discussed in the previous chapter, post-war conditions have produced an increase in the proportion of the population who have grown up being able to “take survival for granted” (Inglehart, 2006). Instead, it is argued that priority is placed on self-expression values, such as environmental protection and gender equality. Studies looking at the existence of postmaterialist values within New Zealand are outlined below.¹⁸

New Zealand

World Values Survey

New Zealand has participated in two waves of the World Values Survey in 1998 and 2004, facilitated by researchers at Massey University. In 1998, New Zealand’s survey was made up of 126 questions and was successfully completed by 1,201 respondents. Of particular relevance to this research, 15.6 per cent of the participants were between the ages of 18-29. In the most recent wave, New Zealand participated with a survey of 126 questions completed by 954 respondents. The number of young New Zealander’s involved in this wave

¹⁸ Empirical studies looking at the influence of postmaterialism values in Australian electoral politics and society are also important to mention. Marks (1997) uses data from a parent-child study to understand the formation of materialist and postmaterialist values. Using parent-child data allows for a stronger analysis of the intergenerational aspect of Inglehart’s arguments. This research confirms the influence of parental socialization, formative security, higher education and contemporary influences on the formation of values. This research also concludes that value formation is ongoing, influenced by continuing socialization experiences. From his findings, the author suggests that “theories on the adoption of postmaterialist values require substantial revamping” (Marks, 1997: 66). A later study by Charnock and Ellis (2004) looks at Inglehart’s materialist/postmaterialist theories in relation to Australian electoral politics. Their findings question the strength of Inglehart’s four-item index, particularly in light of findings relating to the One Nation Party voters who were counter intuitively identified as postmaterialist.

is less clear. For this wave, 6.7 per cent of participants were between the ages of 15-24 and 13.3 per cent were between the ages of 25-34. While the questions covered a wide range of interesting and important issues, the results relating to Inglehart's materialist/postmaterialist measurement are the most relevant to this research and are outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: World Values Survey Materialist/Postmaterialist Results for Individual Questions

Goals for nation Materialist = (m) and Postmaterialist = (pm)	1998 New Zealand results (%)		2004 New Zealand results (%)	
	1st most important	2nd most important	1st most important	2nd most important
A high level of economic growth (m)	70.3	18.1	65.2	21.7
Making sure this country has strong defence forces (m)	1.5	11.2	4.9	16.8
Seeing that people have more say in how things are done in their jobs & communities (pm)	25.4	47.1	24.6	36.9
Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful	2.8	23.5	5.2	24.7
Maintaining order in the nation (m)	33.2	20.2	38.1	20.5
Give the people more say in important Government decisions (pm)	43.5	25.3	36.3	28.8
Fight rising prices (m)	9.1	25.1	8.7	21.4
Protect freedom of speech (pm)	14.1	29.4	16.9	29.2
A stable economy (m)	64.7	17.6	56.6	24.6
Progress toward a less impersonal & more humane society (pm)	17.7	22.5	15.1	18.5
Progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money (pm)	5.4	12.5	4.8	10.7
The fight against crime (m)	12.3	47.3	23.5	46.2

(World Values Survey data, taken from www.worldvaluessurvey.org)

The information in the table above illustrates the popularity of each of the goals in New Zealand at the specific time of the surveys and can be used to draw general conclusions about materialist and postmaterialist priorities. Unfortunately, the data does not provide any information on individual-level values, as it does not isolate an individual's first and second choices. However, New Zealand's results from the 2004 survey have been assessed on an individual-level basis, and the results are detailed in Table 3.3 below. The data is analysed using both the 4-item index (measured as 'materialist', 'mixed', and 'postmaterialist') and the

12-item index (measured using the 0-5 scale), for determining the proportion of participants that can be identified as materialist or postmaterialist.

Table 3.3: World Values Survey Materialist/Postmaterialist Results Based on Indices

2004 New Zealand WVS results of Inglehart's indicators (%)			
4-item index		12-item index	
'Materialist'	10.8	'Materialist'	5.3
'Mixed'	67.1	1	23.4
'Postmaterialist'	22.2	2	32.5
		3	24.8
		4	10.9
		'Postmaterialist'	3.1

(World Values Survey data, taken from www.worldvaluessurvey.org)

New Zealand Election Study (NZES)

The most comprehensive study of New Zealand's political attitudes and opinions is administered by the New Zealand Election Study (NZES). The NZES is undertaken each election year and between 1,000 and 4,000 participants over the age of 18 take part. In its current form, the NZES has been surveying New Zealanders since 1990, focusing on the public's feelings towards important political issues including democracy, representation, participation, policies, the political system and the media. Over recent years, the study has expanded to include surveying election candidates as well as the public. Although following a clear structure, the questions have not always remained consistent and are open to change depending on topical issues at the time of surveying.

The studies conducted during the 1990's (1990, 1993, 1996 and 1999) all included Inglehart's four-item index for measuring postmaterialism. However, only varying levels of information and analysis is available for each year. The data relating to the materialist-postmaterialist question for the 1990 and 1993 elections did receive more attention than the following years. From the results, Wilson (2005) states that in 1990, 9 per cent of participants were identified as postmaterialist, compared with 29 per cent who were identified as materialists. Slightly different results were seen in the 1993 data, with 14 per cent of participants identified as postmaterialist, an increase of 5 per cent from the previous cycle (Wilson, 2005: 221). The proportion of materialists in 1993 was less than in 1990, with 23 per cent of participants being identified as materialist, a decrease of 6 per cent (Wilson, 2005: 221).

At the time, within a broader discussion of value change in New Zealand, these results were interpreted as being reflective of changes in short term economic factors and the saliency of issues such as inflation at the time, as opposed to larger value changes (Vowles *et al*, 1995: 76). An association between materialist or postmaterialist values and political loyalties was found, with those identified as postmaterialist showing a preference for the New Zealand Green Party. Similarly, participants who were supporters of the National Party were found to be significantly more materialistic than supporters of the Labour Party (Wilson, 2005: 211). Despite these findings, the power of the materialism-postmaterialism argument as a "reliable indicator of change in fundamental values among voters in general" (Vowles *et al*, 1995: 76) was questioned.

Table 3.4: NZES Materialist/Postmaterialist Results

Goals for nation	1999 NZES Study (%)	
	1 st most important	2 nd most important
Maintaining order in the nation	43.8	24.2
Give the people more say in important Government decisions	32.3	26.3
Fight rising prices	9.6	23.9
Protect freedom of speech	14.2	25.7

(New Zealand Election Study data, taken from www.nzes.org)

No data or discussion of the materialist-postmaterialist issue was found relating to the 1996 NZES, although the four-item index used for measuring postmaterialism was included in the survey. Information from the 1999 survey is more complete, including the actual percentages for each answer. These are detailed in Table 3.4 above. As was found with the WVS results, the data is useful for drawing general conclusions about the popularity of materialist and postmaterialist values, but it does not provide information at an individual level, as it does not specify an individual's first and second choices.

Social Values in New Zealand

Further research from New Zealand that discusses postmaterialism and utilises the materialist-postmaterialist index is 'A Social-Value Analysis of Postmaterialism' by Wilson (2005). Although taking a psychological rather than political approach, this research provides relevant information through its study of the relationship between social values and postmaterialism, as well as using University students as the participants. Although the ages of the 161 undergraduate students surveyed ranged from 19-47, they had an average age of 21, which makes the findings more applicable to this thesis. The aim of this study was to "attempt to locate Post-materialism relative to politically nonspecific social values" (Wilson, 2005: 209). To achieve this, the participants were each given the twelve-item postmaterialism scale and asked to select the six most important social goals. The participants also completed a 56-item 'Social Values Inventory' from Schwartz (1992), which is made up of ten 'motivational domains' consisting of values that "express fundamental motivational goals that reflect existential needs" (Wilson, 2005: 212).

Wilson's (2005) research produced two important conclusions for this thesis. Firstly, the participants in this study demonstrated a preference for postmaterialist goals, with nearly 80 per cent of the participants selecting three or more postmaterialist goals (Wilson, 2005: 216). Further analysis demonstrated that there was no apparent relationship between age or gender and postmaterialism. Secondly, the results showed clear correlations between the two value scales, suggesting that the materialism-postmaterialism index "taps the intended values" (Wilson, 2005: 216). By producing a statistically significant relationship between Inglehart's and Schwartz's scales, this research supports the claim that postmaterialism is

associated with broader human values rather than being isolated to political values, and that therefore postmaterialism can signify value changes beyond political preferences.

Youth Participation Research Findings -

Young people are often characterised as politically apathetic and disengaged, with labels such as ‘Generation Why Bother’ (Langesen, 2008) being coined to describe the political attitudes and behaviour of today’s youth. However, in order to adequately explain the nature of this apparent indifference towards political life by young people, it is important to understand the motivations behind their political decision-making. Research undertaken within Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand has explored the political behaviour and motivations of young people to help explain the changing patterns of political participation that are being experienced. By looking at the data and conclusions drawn from international studies on youth political participation, it becomes clear that there is an increasing gap between the political attitudes of different generations, as well as changing perceptions of effective and relevant forms of political engagement and participation amongst young people. What is also clear within the results of these studies are the similarities between their findings and conclusions, and the core arguments of postmaterialist theory. Although postmaterialist theory is not used as a measure or barely offered as an explanation, the parallels between the conclusions of these international studies and the arguments of postmaterialism validate the use of the theory for this thesis.

New Zealand

Chief Electoral Office (CEO) – ‘Voter/Non-Voter Satisfaction Survey’

The Chief Electoral Office (CEO) is responsible for the administration of parliamentary elections in New Zealand and is a division of the Ministry of Justice. Following each general election, the CEO undertakes research into levels of voter satisfaction, as well as any barriers to voting, and how these can be addressed for each identified population group (CEO, 2009: 4). One of the population groups focused on is

youth, identified here as those aged between 18-24 years. Amongst the larger group of 1,500 participants, nearly 400 interviewed were youth and 139 of those were ‘youth non-voters’.

Of the many facets of elections, voting and non-voting that were studied; the most interesting aspects for this thesis are the level of interest shown by young non-voters in the election and their reasons for not voting. In relation to interest in the election, despite not voting, 52 per cent of the young non-voters surveyed did follow the election night results and the majority did so through watching television. The young non-voters were also asked how much thought went in to the decision not to vote. The findings from 2008 differed from 2005, with only 13 per cent believing they had put ‘a lot’ of thought in to the decision in 2008, compared with 24 per cent in 2005 (CEO, 2009: 82). Half of the young non-voters in 2008 felt they had thought ‘a little’ about the decision, compared with 32 per cent in 2005 (CEO, 2009: 82).

The main reasons for not voting also differed from the results of previous years. In both 2002 and 2005, the main reason across all age groups that was given for not voting was ‘can’t be bothered with politics or politicians’. In 2008, the results were not as clear. The most common reason given by young people in 2008 was ‘had other commitments’ at 24 per cent, with ‘had work commitments’ and ‘other’ close behind (CEO, 2009: 84). The only other notable reasons were ‘can’t be bothered voting’ at 8 per cent and ‘can’t be bothered with politics or politicians’ at 6 per cent (CEO, 2009: 84). Finally, the participants were asked to rate how influential each reason was on their decision to vote from a list of potential factors. Across all age groups, a distrust of politicians was the most influential at 26 per cent. However, youth were more likely than the rest of the population to say ‘I’m just not interested in politics’, at 38 per cent (CEO, 2009: 86).

Australia

Youth Electoral Study (YES)

Research into youth electoral participation in Australia has been led by the Youth Electoral Study (YES) Project, run jointly by two Australian Universities and the Australian Electoral Commission. The project, as with many other countries, was prompted out of

concern for the low levels of electoral enrolment of young Australians. The objectives of the project are to look at the motivations for young people to vote and to understand the impact of disengaged young people on democracy in Australia (Print *et al*, 2004). Their research focused on students in their final year of secondary school and looked at their attitudes towards enrolment and voting through a nationwide survey and a number of group discussions. The results are consistent with widely held concerns relating to the political attitudes and behaviour of young people, including uncertainty in their own ability to understand political issues and voting processes, low levels of trust in their elected representatives and a low motivation to vote.

As a result of compulsory voting in Australian elections, the findings gauging the participants' intention to vote was reasonably high at 87 per cent (Saha *et al*, 2005: 9). However, the results dropped dramatically when the participants were asked if they believed they would still vote if voting was not compulsory, with only 49.8 per cent believing that they would. Although not truly indicative of potential turnout, the researchers felt this number was a "better measure of the level of commitment to carry out citizenship responsibilities" (Saha *et al*, 2005: 5), as avoiding a fine could no longer be a motivation for voting. Despite these results, the researchers dismiss the popular claims of an increasingly politically apathetic generation of young people, arguing that the participants actually showed high levels of interest in political issues, just not towards voting in elections. Therefore, the researchers have argued that apathy is not the problem and that instead, "the need and challenge is to find meaningful ways to engage young people more constructively so they want to participate" (Print *et al*, 2004: 23).

The second YES research report turned the focus towards the broader political engagement of young people. By looking at young people's participation in other forms of political activity, the researchers hoped to draw conclusions on the relationship between young people's indicators of political engagement and their intentions to vote (Saha *et al*, 2005: 4). The young people were surveyed on their past and future involvement with different forms of political action, which ranged from signing a petition, to taking part in a demonstration. Their interest in, and support for, different social movements were also surveyed, as social movements "provide another avenue for people to become politically engaged with politics" (Saha *et al*, 2005: 18). The results from these questions showed that even whilst at secondary school, the young people were experiencing forms of political

engagement through politically linked activities and social movements. This again supports the researchers' claims against the characterisation of an indifferent or apathetic generation. The research findings also indicate that political engagement in alternative forms of participation at a young age may help promote electoral participation once they reach voting age. Therefore, the researchers believe that the encouragement of this behaviour is a feasible way to "raise the level of political awareness and political engagement among youth" (Saha *et al*, 2005: 28) and consequently help increase levels of enrolment and electoral turnout.

The final two YES reports achieved similar results to the previous studies, confirming the findings that young people in Australia "already hold some attitudes towards democracy, political views and opinions about the social and political landscape" (Edwards *et al*, 2006: 5). The fourth research report looked at the attitudes of the young people toward political parties in Australia. Their results showed low levels of party awareness and party identification amongst the young people interviewed, with many indicating that the political parties "are not really relevant with respect to the issues that concern them" (Saha *et al*, 2007: 6). These findings again seem to support the international research and place Australian youth alongside the trends of disengagement being discovered amongst young people throughout other Western democracies.

Although postmaterialism is not mentioned in the research conclusions, nor in fact are any other theories, there are similarities between their results and the arguments of postmaterialist theory. In particular, the findings of disengagement between young people and the political system, and low levels of party identification and trust in political representatives, parallel postmaterialist thinking. Similarly, the apparent desire to participate more constructively than voting through alternative means of participation, and the involvement in social movements such as peace and environmental groups, are in line with postmaterialism.¹⁹

¹⁹ Also interesting to note here is research by Bessant (2003) that provides an overview of Australian, as well as English and Commonwealth, reports on the engagement of youth with governments. The Australian examples demonstrate the priorities, at the government level, for youth participation. The report from the Victoria Labor Government (2002), for example, emphasised the importance of the state government's commitment to "valuing the contribution of young people, listening to their views and providing them with genuine opportunities for involvement" (2002: 6). However, Bessant (2003) draws attention to the limits of these claims, given that "there is no commitment or requirement on the part of government to give practical effect to their values" (2003: 93).

Canada

Elections Canada (EC)

Canada, as with many other democracies, has been experiencing a significant decline in voter turnout. Strongly featuring within those who are not voting are young people. A large survey undertaken following the 2000 Federal election found that turnout was at only 22.4 per cent among 18-20 year olds (EC, 2003) and reached 25.4 per cent for 18-24 year olds (Pammett & LeDuc, 2003).²⁰ Out of concern for these trends, Canada's Electoral Commission, Elections Canada (EC), has commissioned academic studies and undertaken internal research on the electoral participation of the country's youth.

One of the most interesting findings from this research relates to whether non-voting amongst young people can be explained through life-cycle or generational effects. Work by O'Neill (2001) and Blais *et al* (2002) explain that in the past a person's propensity to vote increased with age and, as a result, life-cycle explanations for low voter turnout amongst youth tended to dominate thinking. Younger cohorts do continue to vote less than older groups, but what recent studies have shown this may be a result of generational effects. It was found that turnout amongst the youngest group of Canadian voters declined significantly between 1988 and 2000, which "suggests that the weaker voter turnout among younger Canadians is not likely to change as they age" (O'Neill, 2001: 34). Similarly, research by Blais *et al* (2002) on 'Generation Y' found that "all in all, age being held constant, the propensity to vote decreases by more than 20 points from the oldest to the most recent cohort" (EC, 2003). Despite these findings, O'Neill (2001) also discovered that membership in interest groups is much higher for young people, which is particularly significant as it was also found that young people are more likely to believe that interest groups had more effect than political parties in creating change.

The research discussed by Elections Canada also explores the reasons behind the trends of declining voter turnout amongst youth. What the research shows is that some of the

²⁰ The low turnout results from the 2000 Federal election also prompted research on the political engagement of young Canadian's by Statistics Canada. Using information from the 2003 General Social Survey (GSS), Milan (2005) discusses the extent of the political engagement of young adults aged 22 to 29 (who were aged 18-25 at the time of the 2000 election). The results showed that young Canadians are politically involved, although in different ways than older Canadians. This participation included higher levels of involvement in product boycotts, petition signing, seeking political information and participation in demonstrations (Milan, 2005).

most popular arguments, including political cynicism and a lack of competitiveness between political parties, are not powerful motivators for those that did not vote (EC, 2003). Instead, the findings by O'Neill (2001) show that the political disengagement of young people "appears less a conscious decision to turn away from politics than a failure to see the importance of political participation" (EC, 2003). This research also reveals that young people often feel that "traditional politics may not be providing effective mechanisms for translating desire into action" (EC, 2003) and that they are "less likely to see voting as an 'essential' democratic act" (O'Neill, 2001: 15). These statements about voting and traditional politics, as well the findings in relation to interest groups, all relate closely to the postmaterialist arguments behind youth non-voting.

North America (The United States and Canada)

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement)

CIRCLE is a non-partisan research centre based at the Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University, which studies the youth civic engagement and civic education of young Americans and Canadians aged between 15 and 25. It is considered to be a leading authority on youth political engagement, and through the production of working papers and fact sheets, CIRCLE aims to draw attention to issues associated with youth political participation. Research undertaken by CIRCLE shows the current concerns for young voter turnout are justified, with results from the 1996 and 2000 U.S. Presidential elections showing that turnout reached the significant lows of around 40 per cent for 18-29 year olds and only 36 per cent for 18-24 year olds (Lopez, Kirby & Sagoff, 2005).

In conjunction with this low turnout, a CIRCLE working paper published in 2008 stated that, compared with previous generations, young American's are "today less likely to see voting as a civic duty and to pay less attention to politics" (Milner, 2008: 4). However, research looking at the ways young people expressed their political views found that they showed high rates of boycotting and buycotting, and were twice as likely as adults to canvass and protest (Marcelo & Lopez, 2007). The research findings from CIRCLE reflect those previously discussed in relation to Australia and Canada, as well as closely relating to

postmaterialist arguments, with youth engagement from traditional politics found to be decreasing whilst involvement in non-traditional forms of participation is on the rise. Similarly, this research found that these trends may be a result of generational reasons, rather than life-cycle effects, as today's youth are less likely to vote than their counterparts in previous generations.

United Kingdom²¹

CYPU (Government's Children and Young People's Unit)

The British Minister for Children and Young People initiated the 'Yvote/Ynot?' project following the 2001 election, after overall electoral turnout reached a low of 59 per cent and turnout for those aged 18-24 was estimated at only 39 per cent (Electoral Commission, 2001). The purpose of 'Yvote/Ynot?' was to understand why young people appeared to be disengaged from Britain's democratic institutions and processes, and explore what could be done to change the situation (CYPU, 2002). Research was carried out through initial discussions with a group of 60 young people, which was then extended to include a survey of over 1,000 young people. The structure of the discussions was based around initial questions asked by the Minister, including whether political parties were focusing on issues that were relevant to young people, whether politicians were seen as effective, and if there was sufficient access to information to allow engagement in democratic processes (CYPU, 2002).

The findings from this and related research from Britain show similar results to those discussed above from other democratic nations. Once again the current political disengagement by young people was found to be a result of generational rather than life-cycle effects, as results from the British Social Attitudes Survey found that only 10 per cent of 18-25 year olds claimed to be 'quite' or 'very' interested in politics, compared with over 20 per cent of the same age group surveyed 13 years earlier (CYPU, 2002). Similarly, while young

²¹ In addition to the government initiated studies detailed below, similar research projects should also be noted. These include the Nestlé Family Monitor Study on young people's attitudes towards politics, which surveyed English and Welsh students in the few years prior to reaching voting age (Nestlé Family Monitor, 2003). Also important to note here is a study by the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) on the political attitudes and participation of youth in the democratic process in Northern Ireland. Through focus groups and surveys with 16-24 year olds, this research produced similar results to related studies including frustration with politicians and scepticism towards the value of voting (ICR, 2005).

people appeared less willing to engage politically through traditional means, the first time voters surveyed were significantly more open to non-traditional forms of involvement such as signing petitions, participating in boycotts or joining issue groups. For example, only 1 per cent of those surveyed were members of a political party and 10 per cent had written to a Member of Parliament. In comparison, 83 per cent of those involved in the study had signed a petition.

In analysing these results, the Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) proposed that it would be unwise to associate young people's low levels of political engagement with apathy, arguing that "it is not that they are switched-off from political issues, but rather that they do not relate to the way our political institutions traditionally communicate with the electorate" (CYPU, 2002: 18). Furthermore, the report confirmed that young people are political, evident through their interest in a number of issues and their involvement in political activities such as environmental campaigning (CYPU, 2002). Ultimately, the project concluded that young people do feel that politics is important and that they want opportunities to have their say and be heard. However, it was also found that young people perceived political institutions and politicians to be "out of touch, with regard to themselves, their views and their priorities (CYPU, 2002). As a result of these findings, a further aim of the 'Yvote/Ynot' project became informing politicians and other relevant bodies about the level of interest young people actually display for politics, despite it often being demonstrated through less conventional means.

Youth Voting Network

As a result of the 'Yvote/Ynot?' project outlined above, the CYPU published the 'Young Person's Agenda for Democracy'. It outlines a list of recommendations made by the young people involved in the project, aimed specifically at politicians, the Government, the Electoral Commission and the media. The Youth Voting Network (YVN) was inspired by this agenda, and is made up of a large number of U.K. organisations working in the field of democracy and participation, particularly among young people. Following from the issues outlined in the 'Young Person's Agenda for Democracy', the Youth Voting Network set up 'conversations' between young people and each of the 'targets' (politicians, the Government, the Electoral Commission, and the media). This was done through focus groups, which

produced information that the targets could then respond to. The document discussed here is a report from these ‘conversations’ and was produced one year following the original agenda.

The overwhelming opinion found was that young people desire more consultation between themselves and the decision-makers, in particular with the Government and the Electoral Commission. The relationship between young people and politicians also appeared to require significant attention. The results show that young people tend to have negative views of MPs, while many politicians felt that any problems lay with young people being apathetic rather than MPs themselves needing to make any changes. A disconnect between them was made clear, as both young people and politicians struggled to relate to each other. There were findings of “a real distrust of politicians” (YVN, 2003: 46) by many young people, which was closely associated with their disengagement from politics. Finally, the discussions on and with the media revealed that young people are ‘discerning consumers’ when it comes to media and politics, and that their disengagement was often far beyond a simple disinterest in politics (YVN, 2003). The lack of engagement was seen as being “not always a manifestation of apathy, or disenfranchisement, but sometimes choice” (YVN, 2003: 46), as young people are showing interest in many issues, although not always through traditional Westminster or party politics.

The studies outlined above reached similar conclusions about the political participation of young Britons. Each piece of research was born out of concern for the low levels of voter turnout by young people, yet each showed that the young people surveyed or interviewed were far from being apathetic. While the research identified feelings of resistance towards traditional politics and cynicism towards politicians, relatively high levels of involvement in alternative means of participation and community issues were found. The study by the CYPUP on the ‘Yvote/Ynot’ project also found evidence that the current trends may be a result of generational effects rather than life-cycle, by drawing conclusions from comparable information from previous decades. These findings are all consistent with those presented from Australia, Canada and the United States, as well as many of the key arguments of postmaterialist theory and youth participation.

Summary -

Democratic literature over recent decades has documented emerging trends of participation within industrial democracies and theorized about the influences behind these trends. Many empirical studies have given support to these claims, highlighting issues of declining voter turnout, increasing cynicism towards political institutions and leaders, and youth disengagement. Recent research on young people has provided important insights into the changing political attitudes and behaviour of many citizens within industrial democracies. Young people appear to be particularly involved in the movement away from traditional politics and towards new perceptions of democracy and participation.

One of the most interesting findings from the research is the message from many young people that they are in fact interested in politics and that they are participating politically, albeit through less conventional means. These findings need to be further explored in light of their disparity with the traditional perceptions of young people, particularly those young people who do not vote. This reflects the impetus for this research; the existence of young New Zealander's who have made a conscious decision not to vote, yet have high levels of internal efficacy. These non-voters, described as 'principled non-voters' by Sheerin (2007), and the influences behind their decision not to vote and the way they participate, are the focus of this thesis.

The hypothesis here is that postmaterialist theory describes the phenomenon of 'principled non-voters'. To examine this hypothesis a set of research questions is used; firstly to examine the nature and qualities of this group, and secondly to compare these findings to postmaterialist theory as it stands in the context of political participation literature.

The questions used to examine the nature and qualities of 'principled non-voters' are:

- . Why do young 'principled non-voters' not vote in general elections?
- . How do young 'principled non-voters' choose to participate politically?

The above are exploratory questions with the aim of finding out about the previously unexplored ‘phenomenon’ of principled non-voters. The final questions are comparative, applying the hypothesis to this exploratory work. The questions to be answered here are:

. Is there evidence that a lack of political representation motivates the participation of ‘principled non-voters’?

. Are the political values of this group consistent with those presented in postmaterialist theory?

The next chapter explores the methodology used in addressing these research questions. The findings and analysis from the interviews and questionnaires are then outlined in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Design

Introduction -

This chapter addresses methodology by outlining and assessing different methods, as well as justifying the methods chosen for this thesis. It then goes on to discuss the participants involved in the research and the research design of this thesis. Firstly, qualitative and quantitative methods are discussed. The fundamental aspects of both approaches are outlined, as well as the advantages and limitations of each for the particular issues and goals of this thesis. From within this discussion, qualitative methods emerge as the most appropriate approach for this research. Specifically, in-depth interviews are chosen as the main research method and the reasons for this selection are then explained. Questionnaires, which are generally associated with quantitative research, are then discussed as they are used for this thesis in addition to the in-depth interviews. This is followed by an outline of the ethical issues involved in researching young principled non-voters, along with a description of the sampling strategies employed. Finally, this chapter discusses the participants selected for this research, the interview process and the tools used for interpreting the research results.

Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methods -

In approaching political science research, the decision of which methodological approach is the most appropriate for the topic and the goals of the research is vital. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies draw on very different theories and methods and, as such, are best suited to certain types of research. Although often considered to be mutually exclusive, quantitative and qualitative research methods can and are often used within the same studies, known as a mixed method approach. Alternatively, each method can be used by different researchers to answer similar questions.

The purpose of political research is described as “looking for patterns and regularities in attitudes and behaviour in order to provide explanations” (Harrison, 2001: 14). Within this definition, the strengths of each approach are highlighted. Quantitative methods, with a reliable, logical and scientific approach to research, are concerned with numerically measuring frequencies to identify patterns and regularities within research findings. However, as is also mentioned in the definition of political research, another important focus of political research is analysing the attitudes and behaviour of individuals or groups, areas which are often not quantifiable and therefore best achieved through a qualitative approach.

While the purpose of quantitative research methods is to provide ‘breadth’ through examining a large number of examples or cases, qualitative methods focus on achieving ‘depth’ by focusing on a smaller, limited number of specifically chosen examples (Blaxter *et al.*, 1996). Similarly, differences between the methods can be identified based on the approach of the researcher. Pierce (2008) describes a quantitative researcher as a “neutral, objective observer studying a person as an object” (2008: 23). In comparison, those using a qualitative approach are seen as “an independent variable engaging subjectively with the person as a subject or client” (2008: 23). The most important differences between quantitative and qualitative research come from the distinctions in the theoretical background of each method. Pierce (2008) describes how the two approaches originate from fundamentally distinct philosophical paradigms, with positivism explaining quantitative research and naturalism explaining qualitative research. As Pierce (2008) surmises, “while positivism emphasises scientific, controlled, replicable experimentation, naturalism seeks to study everyday life in naturally-occurring situations (2008: 28).

Quantitative

Quantitative research was established within the social sciences with the aim of creating a ‘science of society’ to “mirror the respectability of the sciences in the physical world” (Harrison, 2001: 14). As such, quantitative research specialises in providing facts through rational, logical, planned, and systematic means (Pierce, 2008). The strengths of quantitative research lie in its numerical focus, use of large samples, and the objective researchers. The numerical and statistical base of quantitative research allows for simple

comparisons and strong conclusions, as “statistics are probably the easiest and most effective way of supporting an argument” (Harrison, 2001: 15). Quantitative methods like questionnaires or surveys make it simple for researchers to reach large samples of participants that are often representative of the population being studied (Pierce, 2008). The nature of methods such as questionnaires and surveys also ensures that every participant is asked the same question in the exact same manner. This also allows researchers to be seen as “dispassionate, objective and, therefore, trustworthy” (Pierce, 2008: 42).

While there are many advantages to employing quantitative methods in political science research, some concerns are raised within the literature regarding its suitability for the often complex nature of this area of research. Harrison (2001) offers three key weaknesses of the use of quantitative methods in political science research. These are the ‘accuracy of terminology’, a ‘lack of precision’, and an ‘understanding gap’ (2001: 29). Firstly, Harrison (2001) raises the importance of clear terminology, as the use of different definitions between similar studies can give very different results. Secondly, Harrison (2001) emphasises the problem of inconsistencies in the classifications of different responses when inputting data, as well as the inability of researchers to return to a respondent for clarification if necessary. Finally, Harrison (2001) discusses issues relating to the legitimacy of a respondent’s answers when there is a lack of knowledge on the issue being researched. He argues that participants may give different responses to the same question at different times as a reflection of their lack of understanding of the issue, rather than signifying any change in attitude or opinion (Harrison, 2001). From a broader point of view, Harrison (2001) acknowledges that the often subjective and multidimensional nature of a lot of political science research makes a quantitative approach “often complex and certainly imperfect” (2001: 36).

Issues raised by Pierce (2008) on the suitability of quantitative methods for political science research offer a somewhat more convincing and comprehensive perspective, as well as relating more closely to the fundamentals of this thesis. Pierce (2008) criticises quantitative research as being “too detached, remote and clinical to really understand and explore the complex social and political world” (2008: 44). Similarly, Pierce (2008) draws attention to the importance of ‘measurable indicators’ in quantitative research, which limits what can be studied to “measurable variables rather than more important issues” (2008: 44). What is touched on by both Harrison (2001) and Pierce (2008) is the complexity of many areas of political science research that cannot be quantified or measured. Exploring an

individual's attitudes or beliefs, which is often the purpose of political science research, requires greater depth and interpretation than what is possible with quantitative methods. Qualitative methods, in comparison, specialise in this type of research.

Qualitative

Qualitative methods originate from the sociological and anthropological worlds, specialising in in-depth research or observation of small populations. The focus of qualitative research is achieving 'depth' by exploring a small number of examples in as much detail as possible (Blaxter *et al*, 1996). Harrison (2001) argues that "context is the driving force behind qualitative research (2001: 77), as these methods allow researchers to go beyond only *what* is happening by exploring the *why* and the *how*. Kvale (2007) describes the intention of qualitative methods as approaching 'out there', in order to understand social phenomena 'from the inside' (2007: x). Qualitative research is generally undertaken outside of typical research settings, often within the research subject's own environment. This represents one of the most valuable features of qualitative research, which is the opportunity for the researcher to immerse themselves within the population being studied (Devine, 1995: 137).

The greatest strengths of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, lie in their capacity to explore and describe an individual's beliefs and attitudes. As a result of the nature of qualitative methods, as well as the environments within which they are used, a qualitative approach offers researchers the opportunity to gain unique insights into their subjects. Qualitative methods enable the researcher to understand how the participants "construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful" (Kvale, 2007: x). There is a greater reliance on the participant's actions and thoughts in qualitative research, as researchers "seek to see the world through the eyes of the 'subject' and to understand what people feel, interpret and do" (Pierce, 2008: 28). At times the level of researcher involvement within qualitative research does cause concern, although it can significantly add to the quality and substance of the information that is obtained, particularly if a comfortable situation is fostered. Pierce (2008) also discusses the effect of researcher involvement in qualitative research, arguing that a qualitative approach "acknowledges the central role of the researcher in the research rather than pretending that

this can be eliminated” (2008: 47). The appropriateness of qualitative methods within the study of political science is particularly important. Pierce (2008) argues that a qualitative approach is most often preferred because “it is considered best suited to the study, understanding and explanation of the complexities of social and political life” (2008: 45), which is one of the strongest criticisms against quantitative research.

Despite the perceived preference for qualitative research methods within political science, this approach does have some weaknesses. As well as being time-consuming, there are important issues relating to the information that is gathered from the research and the role of the researcher. Firstly, the data or results that are produced from using qualitative methods are very different from those made available through a quantitative approach, as they are neither replicable nor comparable (Harrison, 2001: 79). Criticisms of the results gained from qualitative methods describe the data that is attained as ‘atypical’ (Harrison, 2001) and “largely anecdotal or exaggerated” (Pierce, 2008: 46). As well as making comparisons and firm conclusions difficult, these types of results also cause problems by being open for interpretation. Pierce (2008) argues that with qualitative methods, “the scope for misinterpretation is huge” (2008: 46), as the researcher must interpret information that was already an interpretation by the participant of their own world. In addition, Harrison (2001) argues that the same information will often be interpreted differently by individual researchers.

The close involvement or relationship between researchers and participants that is often seen as a benefit of qualitative research can also create problems. One of the main concerns is the scope for researchers to influence, contaminate, or even determine the research outcomes by closely involving themselves with the participants (Pierce, 2008). There is also the possibility of researchers becoming more sympathetic towards particular participants (Harrison, 2001). A more extreme issue that can arise from researcher involvement is described by the term ‘going native’, which occurs when “researchers adopt the values and perspectives of the people they study, and identify with them so much that they are unable to sustain their previous identity as researchers” (Holloway, 1997: 79).

Despite the issues relating to qualitative research outlined above, it is clear that a qualitative approach is well suited to many facets of political science research. In particular, its ability to explore complex social and political worlds by fostering real human interaction

is extremely valuable for certain research goals. Most importantly, the specific research aims of this thesis will be best achieved by qualitative methods. This thesis does not attempt to gauge the prevalence of young principled non-voters within the wider population, nor measure the degree of their behaviour individually. Rather, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the political attitudes and behaviour of a specific group of young individuals, and to seek to understand the motivations behind their behaviour. As Pierce (2008) explains, qualitative methods allow for the researcher to “learn and understand the underlying values of individuals...by learning the social meanings that the subjects apply to their world” (2008: 45). As such, a qualitative approach, specifically through in-depth interviews, is the principal method of research used in this thesis.

In-depth Interviews -

As a qualitative research method, interviews have been extensively employed throughout the social sciences for some time (Kvale, 2007: 5). In-depth interviews have also proven useful in recent studies on youth political participation in New Zealand (Sheerin, 2007; Lee, 2009). Miller and Crabtree (1999) describe an interview as “a research-gathering approach that seeks to create a listening space where meaning is constructed through an interexchange/co-creation of verbal viewpoints” (1999: 89). Put more simply, Kvale (2007) defines the interview as “a conversation that has a structure and a purpose defined by the one party - the interviewer” (2007: 7). The specific interview approach chosen for this thesis is ‘in-depth’ interviewing, although many other styles exist, including ‘intensive’, ‘conversational’, ‘narrative’ and ‘biographical’ (Weiss, 1994). An in-depth interview is defined as a “particular field research data-gathering process designed to generate narratives that focus on fairly specific research questions” (Miller & Crabtree, 1999: 93).

The manner in which questions are asked, ordered and worded within an interview also varies. Different types of schedules are described as structured or unstructured, or the alternative classification of standardised, semi-standardised, or un-standardised (Harrison, 2001; Pierce, 2008). Both sets of terms are frequently referred to in the literature, although Harrison (2001) refers to an argument by Wilson (1996), which states that the term

‘unstructured’ “is a misnomer implying that it just happens without any consideration or planning” (2001: 91). The categorisation of questions for an interview can also be described using a continuum from highly-structured, where interviewers must follow a tight, predesigned set of questions, to entirely unstructured, where the interview follows the course of general conversation and the roles of interviewer and respondent can interchange (Pierce, 2008: 118). Harrison (2001) uses the standardised terms for describing interview schedules, distinguishing between a standardised interview, which is similar to a survey with every question asked in the same way, an un-standardised interview, which is much like a conversation, and a semi-standardised interview, which allows the interviewer to include a certain level of probing in the interview by asking for clarification and elaboration of the respondents answers (2001: 91-92).

As a qualitative method, the results or data from an interview are the respondent’s answers given in their own words. Interviewers seek to gain information and construct knowledge from what is said and how it is delivered. An interview does not aim to quantify the results, although Kvale (2007) argues that “precision in description and stringency in meaning interpretation correspond to exactness in quantitative measurements” (2007: 12). In contrast to most quantitative methods, an interview employs open questions with the aim of receiving open and lengthy answers (Pierce, 2008). As was mentioned previously in relation to qualitative methods in general, the purpose of an interview is to explore beyond just *what* is happening. An interview is concerned with the *why* and the *how*, as well as the respondent’s beliefs, opinions, forecasts and narratives (Pierce, 2008). Often this depth of discussion involves the exploration of matters that are personal or complex, meaning that ethical concerns within interviewing are very important. As well as ensuring that the interviewee feels comfortable and safe in the environment where the interview takes place, it is also vital for the interviewer to foster a positive and trusting relationship with the interviewee. While gaining information from the interviewee is the purpose of this process, there must always be consideration for the “delicate balance between the interviewer’s concern of pursuing interesting knowledge and ethical respect for the integrity of the interview subject” (Kvale, 2007: 8). The ethical considerations relating to this thesis will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

An interview, when used in the right circumstances, has many advantages as a qualitative research method. Miller and Crabtree (1999) describe the ideal situation for in-

depth interviews as occurring “when the focus of inquiry is narrow, the respondents represent a clearly defined and homogenous bounded unit with an already known context...and the goal is to generate themes and narratives” (1999: 90). One of the most valuable benefits of the interview is the opportunity it gives those being interviewed to speak freely and in their own terms (Harrison, 2001; Jones, 2004). While a questionnaire generally requires its respondents to simply choose an option from predetermined answers, interviews allow the interviewees to respond using “their own language” (Harrison, 2001: 75). Jones (2004) highlights the advantages of an in-depth interview over other qualitative and quantitative methods based on the assumption that the purpose of an interview is to understand an individual’s ‘constructions of reality’. The author argues that it makes sense to actually *ask* the interviewee, as opposed to making assumptions through observation, as well as asking them in a way that lets them talk in their *own terms*, rather than imposed rigidly by the researcher and in a *depth* that acknowledges the rich substance of their meanings, rather than through isolated fragments on a questionnaire (2004: 258).

While offering many benefits, there are some disadvantages with interviewing as a qualitative research method. Most of the issues that can arise are those outlined in discussions of the limitations of qualitative research. One of these issues relates to the research results produced by qualitative methods. Unlike questionnaires that ask the same questions in the exact same manner and produce easily comparable results, an interview will most likely not follow a precise structure and the answers that come from the interviewees will be difficult to compare. Pierce (2008) acknowledges that if comparisons are necessary it is possible in a highly structured interview for an interviewer to ask the same questions to each participant “in an identical way in terms of wording, inflexion and other aspects of delivery” (2008: 118).

Another concern that arises in qualitative research, and with interviewing in particular, is the relationship between the researcher and the participant. A successful interview requires an open, trusting relationship, but it is important that this involvement does not jeopardise the quality and integrity of the research. A related issue is that of interviewer bias, described as the influence, negative or positive, that a researcher can have on the interview (Holloway, 1997). Holloway (1997) refers to a number of factors that can interfere, including “gender, ethnicity or any other group membership of the researchers, as well as their stance and assumptions” (1997: 96). Although these issues do create drawbacks to

interviewing, if care is taken and an awareness of the potential concerns exists, then the interview can offer a powerful and beneficial method to research.

The in-depth interview was chosen as the main research method for this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, the focus of this research is very specific, meaning that interviews are ideal, as well as being feasible because of the small number of potential participants. Secondly, the topic of this thesis focuses on issues that are personal, including political attitudes and behaviour. This makes an interview more appropriate than a focus group, for example, as the participants can speak privately rather than in front of a group. Thirdly, the richness and depth of information that the interview setting provides is ideal for exploring the complex area of an individual's political motivations. Lastly, and more specifically, a semi-structured interview schedule was chosen for the in-depth interviews. Although the same schedule of questions²² was followed for every interview, the process was fluid and additional questions from both the interviewer and the participant were allowed and encouraged throughout the process.

Questionnaires -

This thesis focuses on issues best explored through a qualitative approach and, as such, in-depth interviewing is used as the main research method. However, an important element of this research, postmaterialist theory, is commonly studied through a quantitative approach. The standard measurement of postmaterialist values is assessed through a set of questions in the form of a questionnaire. By combining the use of in-depth interviews with questionnaires, this thesis aims to explore the complex area of individual political motivations, as well as producing internationally comparable data on postmaterialism. Questionnaires, as defined by Pierce (2008), are “essentially pre-designed lists of closed questions with pre-designated, alternative answers, administered to a sample of a population” (2008: 140). Commonly used for market research purposes, but also for generating quantitative data within the social sciences, a questionnaire is based on a list of questions set by the researcher (Harrison, 2001). Questionnaires can either be administered only once,

²² See Appendix One

described as *cross sectional*, which detail the situation at a particular time, or they can be administered on multiple occasions, described as *longitudinal*, where the purpose is to study stability or changes over time (Harrison, 2001).

The main benefits of questionnaires for political research are those previously discussed in relation to quantitative methods in general. Specifically, the ability of questionnaires to provide a researcher with simple, comparable data is extremely valuable, as well as the advantage of drawing strong comparisons and conclusions from this data. The nature of questionnaires also makes it easy to reach a large sample of the population under study and allow researchers to ask all participants the exact same questions in the exact same manner. Another advantage of questionnaires is the opportunity to incorporate previously developed questions into the research. Carlson and Hyde (2003) recommend using existing questions from other researchers whenever possible, citing the benefits of saving time and effort, as well as making direct comparisons with earlier research possible. Despite the perception that questionnaires are a comparatively fast and cheap research method, the actual design of a questionnaire can be both time-consuming and expensive (Harrison, 2001). It is also vital that the questionnaire design is done correctly to ensure that the data and outcomes that it produces are of any value (Harrison, 2001).

Questionnaires were chosen as an additional research method for this thesis, primarily for the advantages of simplicity and comparison. Two separate questionnaires were created: the 'potential interview questionnaire'²³, and the 'pre-interview questionnaire'²⁴. The 'potential interview questionnaire' was designed with the purpose of assessing the suitability of a potential participant before the interview was to take place. As a result of the specificity of the research topic, it was vital that each interviewee could easily be described as a young principled non-voter. To examine this, the 'potential interview questionnaire' focused on the respondent's levels of political interest, political participation (through both voting and non-traditional means), political confidence, and political efficacy. The questions gauging the respondent's own levels of efficacy were taken directly from a questionnaire used by Sheerin (2007) in her research on the efficacy of young New Zealanders, and were originally based on work by Campbell *et al* (1960). The second questionnaire was given to the participants immediately before the interview took place and served two different purposes. Firstly, it was

²³ See Appendix Two

²⁴ See Appendix Three

designed to obtain background information about the interviewee, including age and gender, which was best done outside of an interview. Secondly, it was intended to gain an insight into the interviewee's levels of political interest and participation, as well as their materialist or postmaterialist value priorities. The majority of these questions were based on existing standard questions from the New Zealand Electoral Study (NZES) and the World Values Survey (WVS), in line with the recommendation of Carlson and Hyde (2003). The WVS questions on materialist and postmaterialist values, in particular, were included with the intention of direct comparison with previous research and offer simple interpretation as a result of the materialist/postmaterialist scales described in Chapter Three.

Ethics -

Ethical concerns have become a fundamental consideration for researchers, which is reflected in the creation and importance of ethics codes and committees. In this qualitative research context, ethics are described as “the rules of conduct in research” (Walliman, 2006: 118), and relate to both the researcher and the participant. Despite the existence of codes around research, it is widely acknowledged within the literature that research ethics are not clear-cut, and that instead, “researchers face ethical issues in every stage of the research process” (Flick, 2009: 36). Flick (2009) describes ethics as the protection of the welfare, dignity and rights of the participants. The welfare of the participant relates to the conduct of the researcher, and requires the researcher to weigh up the potential risks for participants, against the benefits of gaining new knowledge (Flick, 2009). Flick (2009) links the participants' dignity and rights with consent, arguing that participants must have voluntarily given consent and have been given sufficient information to rightly give consent. Walliman (2006) similarly raises the importance of consent, arguing that it is vital that participants are given quality information about the research, “enabling them to make a fair assessment of the project so that they can give informed consent” (2006: 154). A final essential factor linked to welfare, rights and dignity, is the confidentiality of the participants.

This thesis followed the guidelines set out by the University of Canterbury Ethics Committee and the research, including the questionnaires and the interview schedule, were

approved by the Ethics Committee. In carrying out the interviews for this thesis, the welfare, rights and privacy of the interviewees were carefully considered. The interviews were conducted in a safe and comfortable environment. Before the interview, each participant was given an information sheet²⁵ that detailed the focus of the thesis and the interview process. It also outlined the rights of the participants to withdraw at anytime throughout the process and to review the transcript after the interview. The participants also signed a consent form²⁶ acknowledging that they understood their requirements and their rights within this research. Both of these documents also explained that pseudonyms would be used to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Sampling Strategy -

In both qualitative and quantitative research projects, the way that the participants are selected is a fundamental part of the research process. Sampling strategies represent an important way that qualitative and quantitative methods differ, as different approaches to sampling can help address different research goals. Some strategies are best suited to quantitative research, like probability sampling, which produces a sample that is representative of the population and allows for generalisations of the population from the data. Other approaches are designed to accommodate a qualitative approach, which are “often guided by the search for contrasts which are needed to clarify the analysis and achieve maximum identification of emergent categories” (Burns, 2000: 289). In other words, qualitative research does not focus on researching an “accurate sub-population” (Harrison, 2001: 75), and the sampling strategies associated with qualitative research reflect this.

Carlson and Hyde (2003) offer an outline of the leading sampling strategies that are best suited to achieve qualitative research goals. Non-probability sampling in general is discussed first, with the authors highlighting the appropriateness of this type of sampling in qualitative research. As the focus of most qualitative research is to gather insights into specific individuals or groups, rather than draw generalised conclusions on a larger

²⁵ See Appendix Five

²⁶ See Appendix Six

population, then choosing cases can be more suitable than finding a random sample (Carlson & Hyde, 2003: 207). The authors also suggest instances where a non-probability sampling method may be appropriate, including situations where the population under focus is too poorly defined to find a probability sample (Carlson & Hyde, 2003: 207). Other appropriate situations are exploratory research projects that aim to develop hypotheses to be further tested with probability samples (Carlson & Hyde, 2003: 207). A specific example of this type of sampling strategy is ‘judgemental sampling’, described by Babbie (2009) as selection “on the basis of the researcher’s judgement about which ones will be the most useful or representative” (2009: 193). Carlson and Hyde (2003) argue that judgemental sampling is appropriate, and even useful, when “the primary goal of selecting cases is not necessarily to achieve representativeness...and where there is no real intention to generalize to a large population” (2003: 208). Judgemental sampling is also thought to be necessary in situations where the population being studied is difficult to define or hard to locate (Carlson & Hyde, 2003: 208).

Another non-probability approach to sampling that is useful with populations that may be difficult to locate is ‘snowball sampling’, explained by Carlson and Hyde (2003) as a process that “begins with a small number of respondents who then identify others with similar characteristics or interests” (2003: 210). This approach is ideal for research that focuses on groups or individuals that “otherwise would be impossible to access” (Burnham *et al.*, 2004: 91). Snowball sampling, or peer referral, is helpful in situations where the number of potential participants is very limited, the desired characteristics for ideal participants are loosely defined, or the focus of study deals with issues that are outside of normal public discussion. One of the key weaknesses of this sampling strategy is that the selected sample is very unlikely to be representative of the wider group being studied (Burnham *et al.*, 2004). As a result, it is suggested that results from this type of research should be used “to generate hypotheses for further research or used to develop tentative generalizations” (Burnham *et al.*, 2004: 91), which is consistent with non-probability sampling methods in general.

A non-probability sampling approach was chosen for this thesis, primarily because the research does not aim to draw conclusions on the New Zealand population in general, or even the population of young principled non-voters within New Zealand. Instead, this thesis aims for an in-depth insight into a small specific group of individuals. A snowball sampling strategy was selected, given the small and difficult to locate nature of the population being

studied. The initial aim of this thesis was to conduct between five and ten interviews with young principled non-voters. In the end, a total of seven young people, who were identified as young principled non-voters, were recruited. Four of the seven interviewees were found through peer referrals and the remaining three interviewees responded to a recruitment advertisement placed in the University of Canterbury student magazine, *Canta*.²⁷

Participants and the Interview Process -

The particular nature of young principled non-voters meant that the individuals being interviewed were selected based on specific criteria. The most important of these criteria were that the participants were aged between 18 and 29, that they had not voted in the 2008 election, that they had made a conscious decision not to vote, and that they showed an interest in politics. To ensure that those interviewed met the above criteria and were appropriate for this research, the 'potential interview questionnaire' was created, although this questionnaire was not needed. Instead, informal discussions with each of the volunteers prior to the interview being organised provided sufficient evidence of their suitability for this research. Once the volunteers were identified as principled non-voters, the interviews were organised.

The number of interviewees that met the criteria was very limited, as expected, meaning that the sample is not representative of the population. Only two of the seven interviewees were female, despite efforts to achieve a closer gender balance. The participants do represent a range of ages within the required age bracket and there is a variety of students, graduates, part-time and full-time workers, and business owners. In addition, when asked to plot their political leanings on a rudimentary left/right scale of 1-10, the participants gave a range of answers from 'further left than 1', through to '10' (extreme right). This diversity in age, situation and political alignment is important as it provides a broad variety of perspectives to a similar decision process experienced by each of the participants. Table 4.1 below outlines the basic profiles of the participants, including their gender, age and occupation. Note that pseudonyms are used. The table also shows their enrolment status, the

²⁷ See Appendix Four

number of elections each participant has been eligible to vote in and how many times the participants have actually voted.

Table 4.1: Participant Profiles

Name	Male / Female	Age	Enrolled to vote	Times voted / elections eligible for	Political Alignment left (1) - right (10)	Occupation
Steve	male	20	yes	0 / 1	8	Studying undergraduate level
Jess	female	21	yes	0 / 1	n/a	Studying undergraduate level + working part-time
Josh	male	22	yes	1 / 2	10	Working full-time + studying post-graduate level part-time
Alex	male	24	yes	1 / 2	'further left than 1'	Working part-time + running own business + graduate
Rebecca	female	25	yes	2 / 3	n/a	Working part-time + graduate
Earl	male	27	yes	0 / 3	5	Working full-time running own business
Chris	male	28	yes	2 / 3	1	Studying post-graduate level + working part-time

The interviews were conducted with the seven young people following the 2008 New Zealand general election. Four of the interviews took place in a private office within the Political Science Department of the University of Canterbury. The remaining three interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the participants; the living rooms of two of the interviewees, and a cafe. Six of the interviews took place in Christchurch and the remaining interview took place in Wellington. Before each interview commenced, the participants read the information sheet, read and signed the consent form and completed the pre-interview questionnaire. The participants were then given the opportunity to ask any questions that they

may have had about the research or interview process. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, and was tape-recorded and later transcribed by the researcher.

Following the completion of all seven interviews, the questionnaires and interview transcripts were examined. Interpreting the results from the questionnaires was a relatively straightforward process, given that the questionnaire was based around already established questions. The most important set of questions were those relating to materialist and postmaterialist values, which were taken directly from the World Values Survey. For this research, the participants' responses to the materialist/postmaterialist questions were analysed using both the 4-item and 12-item measures provided by Inglehart. This meant that each participant was identified as 'materialist', 'mixed', or 'postmaterialist', based on the 4-item index, and given a number between 0 and 5, based on their responses to the 12-item index. Their results are detailed in Table 5.6 in the following chapter, along with discussion on the validity of these measures for assessing value priorities.

The questionnaire also included standard questions used for understanding levels of internal and external efficacy. These questions required the participants to choose from four pre-determined answers that measured their levels of interest in politics and satisfaction with democracy. This meant that each of the participants' answers were clear and required little interpretation from the researcher. The participants' answers to these questions were combined with their responses to the efficacy questions in the interview to give an overview of their levels of efficacy. These results are detailed in Tables 5.2 and 5.4 in the following chapter. The final set of questions, other than those used to gather basic demographic details of the participants, was taken directly from the New Zealand Electoral Study. These questions gauge the participants' involvement in different methods of political participation by asking for the frequency of their participation in the past three years. The responses from these questions are outlined in Table 5.5. Based on their answers, the participants were divided into those who participated frequently and those who did not. This division was quite clear, as four of those interviewed had participated in each of the activities at least once. The remaining three participants had barely any involvement in these kinds of participation, with only one of the three having participated in one activity in the last three years.

The remainder of the information used to understand the attitudes and behaviour of the principled non-voters was obtained through in-depth interviews. As a qualitative research technique, in-depth interviews arguably require more subjective analysis from the researcher. The transcripts for each of the interviews were read through and highlighted. As well as focusing on the common threads between the participants that emerged, this research also looked for the important and interesting aspects of each participant that differentiated them from the remaining participants. The interview questions were grouped into broad areas relating to the main research questions of this thesis, which allowed for easier analysis. These areas were; internal and external efficacy, reasons for not voting, participation, representation and their future behaviour. Throughout the following chapter, the responses relating to each of these areas are outlined. For most of the questions, the approaches of the participants were summarised and grouped according to the common threads, supported by excerpts from the interviews. The use of excerpts from the interviews strengthens the research and the analysis being made, as it allows the sentiments of the participants to be expressed in their own words.

Conclusion -

This chapter has justified the methodological approach of this thesis, including its qualitative focus and the choice of in-depth interviews as the main research tool. The ability of interviews to explore issues at great depth and allow participants to communicate in their own words is invaluable. As important, however, is the use of questionnaires to provide this research with internationally comparable data on certain areas of interest. This chapter also outlined the research process used for this thesis, including how the participants were located, profiles of the participants and how the interviews were conducted. The following chapter addresses the main aspects of this thesis by presenting the findings and analysis from the interviews and questionnaires.

Chapter Five: Research Findings and Analysis

Introduction -

This chapter addresses the focus of this thesis; the attitudes and behaviour of ‘principled non-voters’. Using the information and insights gained through the questionnaires and interviews with the principled non-voters, this chapter focuses on outlining the key results and seeking to answer the main research questions of this thesis.

The chapter begins with a section entitled ‘principled non-voters’, which assesses the participants’ relevancy and suitability for this thesis through discussion of their voting behaviour and their efficacy levels. Once these preliminary factors have been determined, the research questions are each approached: why the participants did not vote; how they participate politically, including their views on alternative methods of participation; and the influence of postmaterialist theory on their attitudes and behaviour. These questions are related back to the core elements of literature that this thesis approaches, including the leading voting theories, and issues relating to the health of democracy. This chapter concludes with the participants’ views on their future voting/non-voting behaviour.

Principled Non-voters -

The focus of this thesis is on the attitudes and behaviour of young principled non-voters. As a result, the validity of the participants for this research needs to be confirmed. Although the definition of a principled non-voter is only loosely defined, the most important characteristics that have been identified are a conscious decision not to vote in general elections and a relatively high interest in politics. This interest in politics is reflected in high levels of internal efficacy. The importance of external efficacy in relation to principled non-

voters is less understood, and so is also explored in this research with the hopes of gaining a better understanding of its influence. Outlined in this section are the participants' answers about their decision not to vote, as well as their responses to the questions relating to internal and external efficacy.

Non-voting

All of the seven individuals interviewed were enrolled to vote but none had voted in the 2008 election. The interviewees were each asked '**How and when did you reach the decision not to vote?**'. As detailed in Table 4.1 in the previous chapter, four of those interviewed had voted on at least one previous occasion and two of the interviewees were first time voters. The participants that had voted in previous elections (Alex, Rebecca, Josh and Chris) represent an interesting perspective, as they had all made a deliberate decision to change their behaviour. For these principled non-voters, this decision not to vote was part of a gradual process away from voting, strongly influenced by increases in their knowledge of, and confidence in, their own perspectives. Although also influenced by these factors, for Chris it was a specific incident that most strongly changed his attitudes towards voting.

Chris: Just after the last general election...I voted in that, I voted Green thinking they might be a viable option and then the first thing they did after the election was talk to the Business Roundtable, so they lost my vote. That probably radicalised me even more I'd say. It was that the more I looked at it and the more I read...

Rebecca: Ah, this is very interesting!...I guess it's just that my kind of views on how the world works and stuff and how I want to participate have changed and I just feel like I don't really have much faith in governments and I'm way more interested in organising in my own community in a way more local level

Alex: Yeah, it's really funny. I mean last election I was a big pro-voter...then I think like a lot of anarchists you tend to relook at it and you start exploring the politics a bit more and start to realise there's other ideas out there about voting and so I think in that period from the last election to this election I started to become more aware of anarchist ideas and organising

Josh: I think first time it's like you've never done it before, it's like this big thing that you can vote for the first time so you get caught up in the idea that you have some capacity to influence these things ...So the first time I voted I understood that what I was doing was probably a stupid thing, but I did it because that's what everyone else was doing and I didn't want to be the weird guy that doesn't vote compared to all my other friends who are equally interested in politics and therefore think that it's very important to vote...you just invite people to argue with you, so my willingness to just go 'look, this is what I think' increased. I think second time around I also had a greater understanding of the harms of collective decision making

Earl, who has been eligible to vote in three elections but has never voted, made the decision not to vote at a very young age, maintaining the same attitude towards elections and voting that he developed at primary school.

Earl: I asked my teacher who they were voting for, then all I said to them was 'why?' and just watching their reaction and them freaking out and realising that they didn't have a good answer....you know, my teacher who I respected and is awesome, voted for someone just because, and then that's when I thought 'that's so messed up, I'm not even going to touch it'

For the two youngest participants, Steve and Jess, the 2008 election was the first they were eligible to vote in. They were also the least certain of those interviewed about their decision not to vote, which for both had only been decided in the weeks leading up to the election.

Jess: well I've sort of been going back and forth, but a lot of it is because the whole thing is beyond a joke, the way things are run...

Steve: just before the election...basically I've been quite unsure...I like the parties, I think they each bring something to the table, but then there's also the fact that I don't agree with one sufficiently, to make it stand out

By looking at these responses to the question of how and when the decision not to vote was made, the variety of perspectives on this issue becomes clear. Each of the participants has approached the decision based upon individual circumstances or influences,

and the decision had been made with varying degrees of certainty. However, within this group common threads did emerge. In particular, the strength of the ideological stances of four of the participants (Chris, Rebecca, Alex and Josh), differentiates them from the remaining three participants (Earl, Jess and Steve). This distinction remains relatively consistent through the interviews, which is clarified and explored further in this chapter.

Efficacy

The efficacy levels of principled non-voters is an interesting factor to this research, as it is this that sets these participants apart from the typical expectations of young non-voters. The participants' levels of internal and external efficacy were gauged using standard efficacy questions in both the interviews and questionnaires. The responses to the internal efficacy questions are discussed below and summarised in Tables 5.1 and 5.2. The responses to the external efficacy questions are then discussed and summarised in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

Internal Efficacy

International efficacy literature maintains that individuals who do not vote tend to have low levels of internal efficacy, whereas voters will display higher levels of internal efficacy. Here, internal efficacy is measured by the participants' perceptions of politics and their interest in politics. The expression of politics as a broad concept reaching into everyday life experiences and the appreciation of the importance of politics are indications of high levels of internal efficacy. In comparison, individuals who give a narrow definition of 'politics', do not believe politics is important to them or show a lack of interest in politics, are considered to have low levels of internal efficacy. Table 5.1 summarises the trends in the participants' answers to the internal efficacy questions. The first two questions were asked during the interviews and the final question was a part of the questionnaire.

Table 5.1: Principled Non-voters and Internal Efficacy

<p>What does 'politics' mean to you?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Five participants discussed politics as a broad term beyond the ideas of government and voting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. Alex: for me politics is more than just a system of government or the kind that's in Wellington, it's more about systems and relations...it's rooted in everyday life e.g. Steve: I suppose when I first think, I think of government, but when I think about it more generally it's just basically the way people get along with each other and manage to negotiate - The two remaining participants referred to a narrower definition of politics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. Earl: to me it's the whole parliament image of these people getting together and discussing all the important things
<p>How important is politics to you?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For three of the participants, politics was deemed to be extremely important, particularly in relation to politics as a broad concept <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. Chris: it's the number one most important thing, definitely e.g. Rebecca: it's really important, if it's in the broad sense. Like everything I do is about working out those kinds of things, I guess there's that really clichéd feminist thing about 'the personal is political' and I think that that is really important for me in my life - Two of the participants felt that politics was very important and that it was necessary to stay informed, but they both registered uncertainty as to whether this was a positive thing or not <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. Josh: I do lots of reading about politics and economics and public policy...I think politics is particularly important, because they have so much power, but I wish that it was less important - One participant expressed the importance of politics, but on less of a personal level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jess: I guess as a student, politics is important because of maintaining the education system - One participant was reluctant to acknowledge the importance of politics because of feelings of disempowerment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earl: I don't get caught up in it because I've got too many things that bother me about it but there's nothing I can do about it
<p>How interested would you say you are in politics?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This question appeared on the questionnaire and offered four potential responses: <i>very interested, fairly interested, slightly interested, or not at all interested</i> - Five participants selected <i>very</i> - One participant selected <i>fairly</i> - One participant selected <i>slightly</i>

Some of the participants' responses are discussed below. A summary of the levels of internal efficacy levels for all of the participants is detailed in Table 5.2. For each of the questions, the majority of participants gave responses that show relatively high levels of internal efficacy. For example, one participant (Alex) stated that he was *very interested* in politics, described politics as a broad concept 'rooted in everyday life', and expressed the strong importance of politics:

Alex: in the way I view things it is really important. It's the framework for how I try to live my life I guess ...In terms of national politics, it's really important as well because obviously national politics influences the way things are run and the way society is structured...It is important for me to have an understanding of stuff but it's not necessarily important for me to be involved in it

Another participant also showed a relatively high level of internal efficacy, although discussed the term 'politics' in a negative light, arguing against it in its current form:

Josh: Politics to me essentially means we're all coming together and making decisions. The problem is I don't think that's genuinely how it works. I don't think there's an idea that people who vote generally necessarily believe in what they're doing. And I also don't think that they have genuine control of the outcomes

Across the internal efficacy questions, two participants stood out as having less internal efficacy than the other participants. Earl and Jess both gave narrow answers to what the term politics meant to them and selected *slightly* and *fairly*, respectively, when asked how interested they each were in politics in the questionnaire. These two participants also gave relatively similar answers when asked how important politics is to them. Both believed that politics was important, but referred to frustration with politicians and difficulties with feeling informed:

Jess: When you see it on the news or hear about it or read about it in the paper it's like...again, what are they complaining about it?

Earl: I've just got to hope that the people, like Helen Clark or whatever, do their job. But I don't sort of get too caught up in it because there's not much I can do about it.

Table 5.2: Levels of Internal Efficacy

	Q1: What does politics mean to you?	Q2: How important is politics to you?	Q3: How interested would you say you are in politics?
Chris	Broad definition <i>High</i>	Extremely important <i>High</i>	Very interested <i>High</i>
Alex	Broad definition <i>High</i>	Extremely important <i>High</i>	Very interested <i>High</i>
Rebecca	Broad definition <i>High</i>	Extremely important <i>High</i>	Very interested <i>High</i>
Josh	Broad definition <i>High</i>	Very important <i>High</i>	Very interested <i>High</i>
Steve	Broad definition <i>High</i>	Very important <i>High</i>	Very interested <i>High</i>
Jess	Narrow definition <i>Low</i>	Important <i>Average</i>	Fairly interested <i>Average-Low</i>
Earl	Narrow definition <i>Low</i>	Not important <i>Low</i>	Slightly interested <i>Low</i>

These results suggest that Jess and Earl do not fit the requirements of this research, as a high level of internal efficacy is one of the fundamental characteristics of a principled non-voter. However, throughout their interviews these two participants displayed notable levels of political awareness through expressing real interest in a range of political issues, as well as implying a high interest in surrounding themselves with political discussion. The concerns with politics raised by these participants appear to be more in line with findings of low external political efficacy, which will be discussed below.

These findings highlight the effectiveness of qualitative methods, as further discussion beyond the standard efficacy questions was required to ascertain the levels of political interest of some of the participants. Despite these two participants not fitting perfectly within the initial description of a principled non-voter, it is felt that all seven of the participants interviewed displayed sufficient levels of political interest and awareness to be considered suitable for this research.

External Efficacy

Exploring external efficacy offers additional insight into the political attitudes of principled non-voters, as well as relating to the arguments around the problems with democracy discussed in Chapter Two. The results are discussed below and summarised in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

Table 5.3: Principled Non-voters and External Efficacy

<p>Do you think politicians listen to young people?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Yes:</u> Two participants believed that politicians do listen to young people, however only students. For one participant, this was a negative thing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. Josh: I think that increasingly politicians are paying attention to young people...that's because they've created a system where there are a lot of them that have shared interests, and it's mainly because of an increase in the number of people in universities...it worries me when they listen too much to any one particular interest group - <u>No:</u> Three participants argued that politicians do not listen to young people, taking the cynical approach that it only happens when it is in the interest of the politician or party <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. Jess: No, they just say they do just to get votes, so they can just be elected - <u>Sometimes:</u> Two participants felt that politicians do sometimes listen to young people, but it was dependent on the politician <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alex: Like you could stereotype politicians and say that they don't and they're more concerned about getting in to power, or whatever, but then again I guess some politicians have some kind of degree of understanding for young people Rebecca: I think it would be wrong to say they don't, because I think that some do
<p>On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in New Zealand?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This question appeared on the questionnaire and offered four potential responses: <i>very satisfied</i>, <i>fairly satisfied</i>, <i>slightly satisfied</i>, or <i>not at all satisfied</i> - Five participants selected <i>not at all</i> - One participant selected <i>very</i> - One was unable to answer the question

<p>Do you think it matters who wins an election?</p>	<p>- <u>Yes</u>: Two of the participants felt that it did matter who won an election, although to quite different degrees</p> <p>Earl: Definitely...that was the only reason why I was going to vote [because he felt so negatively towards one of the leading political parties at the most recent election]</p> <p>Rebecca: I think it does...there will be real kinds of consequences for certain people, depending on who wins an election</p> <p>- <u>No</u>: Four participants believed that it did not matter who won an election, on both a personal and a more general level</p> <p>e.g. Alex: on a personal level, not really, no. To me whoever is in power is all the same, within the same framework...it's not actually a matter of necessarily voting in the lesser evil, they're still both evil, you know?</p> <p>e.g. Josh: no, pretty much no...Modern day politics is really a race to the centre to see who can win enough votes. That means their policies become almost identical</p> <p>- <u>Unsure</u>: One participant was unclear as to whether or not it mattered who won an election</p> <p>Jess: in some ways yes and in some ways no...</p>
<p>Do you think your vote could make a difference in an election?</p>	<p>- <u>Yes</u>: None of the participants could definitively argue that their vote could make a difference in an election</p> <p>- <u>No</u>: Five of the participants did not believe that their vote could make a difference in an election. Four of these participants were adamant in this argument.</p> <p>e.g. Chris: No...I think the odds of actually making a difference are so slim it's ridiculous</p> <p>e.g. Steve: No. Absolutely not</p> <p>One did concede that individuals as a group can make a difference</p> <p>Earl: I don't think my vote would make any difference at all. But in saying that, if enough people like me are saying no, then of course it would make a difference</p> <p>- <u>Unsure</u>: The two remaining participants struggled to answer this question, as it implied support for a way of organising that they no longer agreed with</p> <p>Rebecca: I guess you could argue that it would, because at the end of the day it's all like one vote plus one vote plus one vote...but I don't know. No, I mean I'm just not interested in that system</p>

The question, **‘Do you think that politicians listen to young people?’** prompted a variety of responses, however all participants were united in their scepticism about the relationship between politicians and young people. For example, the two participants that did believe that politicians listen to young people felt that it was only students who were listened to, and this was purely as they represent a large group of potential voters with similar concerns. Two participants believed that politicians, in general, do not listen to young people but conceded that it was very dependent on the individual politician. The remaining three participants all felt that politicians do not listen to young people, unless it is in the politician’s own interest. For example:

Chris: No...To a certain degree, where they have to...If they are forced to listen to them they would, but otherwise they won’t

Earl: they are only interested in what would make their party or them as a politician look good, so that’s all they’d actually care about

As well as the general feelings of cynicism towards politicians, many of the participants expressed concern about the perceptions of young people and youth issues. This concern was often attributed to the media, as well as political representatives. For example:

Rebecca: I think in general I feel like youth are really kind of misrepresented...I just don’t think the right questions get asked about, you know, issues to do with young people a lot of the time. It does kind of seem like there are a lot of assumptions that are made by politicians and people in power about young people, instead of actually maybe finding out what...you know, instead of doing some deeper analysis...yeah, it’s really hard to get good information on things in New Zealand I think

Chris: when it comes to the crunch, they don’t support them. Like, for example, the boy racers and stuff like that. Why has no one done anything for them? All they’ve done is crack down on it, but they’ve been there for years, the so-called problem has been there for years, but no one has tried to fix it except through punishment

When asked, **‘Do you think it matters who wins an election?’** the participants’ responses varied between a focus on a broader, national level, to the impacts at a personal level. Nearly all of the participants referred to the similarities between the two major political

parties in New Zealand; Labour and National. It was generally expressed that because of the similarities between these parties it would make little difference which of them won in an election. Two of the participants answered this question on a personal level, discussing the potential impact the winner of an election could have on their day to day lives. For example:

Rebecca: Well, I mean no, because I'm deciding not to vote. It's not like it's actually going to make a huge difference in terms of, like, my choices about how I live my life whether National or Labour wins an election

The question '**Do you think your vote could make a difference in an election?**' produced the clearest results of low external efficacy amongst the participants. All seven of the participants did not feel that their vote could make a difference in an election. This belief was demonstrated to varying extents, with most adamantly arguing that it could not make a difference. One participant acknowledged that his opinion on this issue had changed dramatically following the 2005 election when he had been an avid voter:

Alex: I was like 'every last vote counts'...but for myself who [now] thinks that community and direct action and organising is way more valuable, I don't think that one vote will count

One participant raised an interesting argument while answering this question, referring to the power in the act of not voting. Interestingly, this participant was the only young non-voter who registered satisfaction with how democracy works in New Zealand, whilst all other participants expressed their dissatisfaction with democracy when asked in the questionnaire:

Steve: I do think there is a responsibility to stay informed and I think that not voting can say as much as not voting

Table 5.4 below provides a summary of the participants' levels of external efficacy and highlights the complexity of this measure. Whilst the results for external efficacy were generally lower than the levels of internal efficacy, the results were significantly less consistent across individual results. For some of the participants, their answers to two of the

questions implied high levels of external efficacy, while their responses to the remaining questions showed low levels. Another interesting finding was the result for Rebecca, which gave an incomplete picture of her views. Throughout the interview, Rebecca expressed very low external efficacy through her attitudes towards politicians, representation and New Zealand's political system. However, at times the strength of her views left her unable to answer the external efficacy questions. This was largely because the questions were based on concepts, such as voting, which she no longer believes in.

Table 5.4: Levels of External Efficacy

	Q1: Do you think politicians listen to young people?	Q2: Do you think it matters who wins an election?	Q3: Do you think your vote could make a difference in an election?	Q4: How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in New Zealand?
Chris	No Low	No Low	No Low	Not at all satisfied Low
Alex	Sometimes Average	No Low	No Low	Not at all satisfied Low
Jess	No Low	Unsure Average	No Low	Not at all satisfied Low
Josh	Yes High	No Low	No Low	Not at all satisfied Low
Rebecca	Sometimes Average	Yes and No Average	n/a -	n/a -
Earl	No Low	Yes High	No Low	Not at all satisfied Low
Steve	Yes High	No Low	No Low	Very satisfied High

This section confirms the suitability of those interviewed for this study of principled non-voters. None of the participants voted in the most recent New Zealand general election in 2008 and all made a conscious decision not to. From their responses to the questionnaires and interviews, the participants demonstrated relatively high levels of internal efficacy. This finding is in line with the literature on principled non-voters, although differs from traditional expectations about non-voters, particularly young non-voters, as apathetic. Interestingly, the participants all exhibited quite low levels of external efficacy. The relevancy of external

efficacy to the attitudes and behaviour of principled non-voters has not been explored to the same extent as internal efficacy, meaning this finding is open to interpretation. The relationship between external efficacy and the issues of representation and democracy discussed in Chapter Two highlight the relevancy of external efficacy to the wider literature on the health of democracy and postmaterialist theory. Having established these participants as appropriate examples of principled non-voters, this chapter now turns to answering the key research questions of this thesis.

Question One -

Why do young ‘principled non-voters’ not vote in general elections?

One of the most important elements to this thesis is determining why these young principled non-voters do not vote in general elections. This question is so important because their attitudes and behaviour appear contrary to most of the expectations and findings relating to young non-voters. The general perception of young people who do not vote is that this behaviour stems from a lack of confidence, a lack of interest or feelings of apathy. Principled non-voters, however, display high levels of political awareness and interest, and rather than lacking the motivation to vote, these young people have made a deliberate and principled decision not to vote in general elections. How and when these participants made the decision not to vote was discussed in the first section of this chapter. This chapter now turns to exploring the reasons behind the decision not to vote for each of those interviewed.

During the interviews, each participant was asked ‘**What are the reasons behind your decision not to vote in general elections?**’. Each of the answers and subsequent discussion from the participants is detailed below. While each answer is personal to the participant, some broad similarities between their approaches and attitudes do emerge. Four participants (Chris, Josh, Rebecca and Alex) all strongly related their decision not to vote to problems with the current system of government in New Zealand, although this was approached from different perspectives. Each referred to political ideologies that differ from the mainstream as guiding their political attitudes and behaviour. Interestingly, these are the

same four participants who had voted previously. Chris described himself as anti-capitalist and found inspiration from readings on Cuba and Fidel Castro, whereas Josh described his political leanings as libertarian. Rebecca and Alex both acknowledged the influence of anarchist thought, although Rebecca did this quite hesitantly.

Chris: All of the parties in the party vote are all capitalist that I can't support. They've all got the same agenda. I couldn't support them so I wouldn't vote for them.

Interviewer: If you were trying to explain to somebody why you don't vote, what would you say?

Chris: None of them are even on the same spectrum, they're not even close...There's nothing that these parties do that help workers unless they're forced to do it

Josh: Well I think when anybody comes to vote they need to weigh up the costs and benefits. Now the cost of me voting is I have to leave my house, I have to walk down to the polling booth and the benefit to me is next to nothing. My vote will not alter the election, it's not going to change the result, so I can't see any reason as to why I should leave my house and go and do something that is going to have no effect, other than make me feel good or something...I have no duty to vote, I will vote if I want to. What frustrates me is the idea that it's not ok to say that I'm not going to vote. The right to vote entails the right to choose not to as well...

Rebecca: I don't sort of have faith in that system and I'm kind of interested in, like seeing that system kind of be deconstructed... Another reason is as someone who sort of has a feminist analysis of the thing, I kind of associate government as sort of like this patriarchal institution and I just don't think, just because there are women in positions of power doesn't mean all women in New Zealand have a fair deal... I think it's really sad that a lot of people kind of have this idea that we live in a, we supposedly live in a democracy but all we do is go and vote once every three years or whatever...and that's the only way we can participate. And I just think that that is really short-changing ourselves

Alex: There a couple of reasons and essentially it's through anarchism...One of the problems with government and the world is that too many people place their interests somewhere else instead of taking control of their interests directly....That implies the imbalance of power, someone has more power over you because you've essentially delegated that power to someone else...voting encourages people to be passive... it was a conscious decision to say 'I'm not going to vote because I have these moral

standpoints'...for a lot of people elections seem to be the only way to have a say in their political life and that just made me even more determined to not vote and to actually try and put across their alternatives

The remaining three participants did not express any particular influences and were less adamant in their disappointment with New Zealand's political system, although this was still a factor on their decisions not to vote. The key binding issue for these three participants (Earl, Jess and Steve) were the difficulties associated with informed voting. Earl, who had decided not to vote from a very young age, felt that it would take commitment equivalent to a full-time job in order for him to be sufficiently informed to make an adequate decision:

Earl: Because I haven't studied the whole thing. I would be disappointed in myself for voting for the sake of voting, and for them to tell me that I'm bad for not voting, whereas everyone else that votes probably doesn't know what it's about

Interviewer: So it's like informed voting? You'd rather make a vote that was informed, whereas the people that are voting aren't informed, so why does your 'not vote' mean anything less than their uninformed vote?

Earl: Yeah. Exactly, yes. And so that's why the whole thing is a bit disappointing

Jess and Steve had similar views about the difficulty of finding enough information about political parties, as well as the lack of real choice between the leading parties:

Jess: ...it was because I was working that day and it didn't matter which way you decided to vote because it was all going to be bad whichever way you went

Interviewer: If you didn't have to work, do you think you would have voted?

Jess: I don't know...You don't really get to see much of the things that all the parties put out. It would be good if there was more...

Steve: Basically I suppose because I can't really, I don't really see a party that fully, that I'm fully happy pledging my vote to...also, the more and more I think about it, the less relevant it all seems

Interviewer: What do you think non-voting says?

Steve: For me it basically says I can't decide between the pigs in the pen. I think that's the signal I send because I feel I do keep in touch, and I think, especially this election, they tried to get people to vote. Not that I think my message will be heard, but I think I'm within my rights to do so

The interview process allowed the participants to discuss the influences on, and motivations behind, their decision not to vote, and do so in their own words. The participants' answers to this question gave some insight into any potential links between their perspectives and the dominant voting theories described in the literature. The answers from Josh showed the clearest influence of a specific voting theory, rational choice theory. This was expressed in his description of weighing up the costs and benefits associated with voting in order to make the decision of whether to vote or not. Earl and Steve also gave responses that could be related to rational choice theory, in terms of their concerns for the costs involved in staying sufficiently informed to confidently make an informed and valuable vote.

Rebecca and Alex both acknowledged the influence of anarchist thought to their perspectives on voting and participation. Although this came through strongly, there were also references to some of the important aspects of postmaterialist arguments for non-voting behaviour. This was particularly evident in their focus on non-traditional forms of political participation. The final two participants, Jess and Chris, expressed disillusionment with the current opportunities for political representation and participation in New Zealand, which also shows an association with postmaterialist theory. The extent of any influence of postmaterialist theory to this non-voting behaviour will be further explored throughout the remainder of this chapter.

The influence of family and friends on voting behaviour is an important area to study, given the potential sway this could have on an individual's decision of whether to vote or not. The participants were asked '**Do you know if the people around you, i.e. family, friends, colleagues, etc, vote?**'. Dependent on the participant's answer, this question also prompted discussion in some of the interviews about whether voting and politics were talked about as a family, either now or when they were growing up. For Josh and Chris, politics was an important part of their family life. Josh discussed the many debates and arguments amongst his family over politics and his parent's disappointment that both he and his brother choose

not to vote. He believed that his brother and some of his friends do not vote for similar reasons as himself:

Josh: I'm quite in to politics and all my friends are quite interested in politics, so all the people that didn't vote...it wasn't a matter of apathy

Chris described the huge importance elections and voting played in his life growing up. Despite this, he believed that his parents were very supportive of his decision not to vote, whereas he felt that many others in his life did not understand.

Interviewer: So was voting something that was talked about in your home when you were growing up?

Chris: Oh yeah, definitely. Huge, it was a really important night, big night - election night

Interviewer: Oh really? So you knew who your parents voted for?

Chris: Yep. There were pictures of Michael Joseph Savage on the wall! So yeah, Labour through and through

Steve felt that his family did talk about politics and voting, but only in recent years. He knew that his parents definitely voted, as well as his flatmates, with whom he also discussed elections and voting. Both Alex and Rebecca did not think that politics and voting were really talked about or were big things in their families. Alex and Rebecca were similar to Josh in that they both spoke of being surrounded by friends who shared similar viewpoints towards voting and participation as themselves. Alex felt that he became aware of politics through music and reading, rather than from his parents. He did know who his parents voted for, however, which he believes was a large influence on how he voted in his first election. For Rebecca, the awkwardness of discussing politics with her parents was raised:

Rebecca: I feel like it's quite difficult to talk to them about my decision to not vote...Yeah, no. I think that my parents would definitely respect my decision to not vote and they know that I'm quite 'politically active', whatever the heck that means

Jess and Earl both described less political upbringings and social worlds to the other participants. Jess said that politics was something that was never talked about within her family, although she was aware that her parents did not vote. She was unsure whether her friends and the people she worked with voted or not. Earl similarly felt that politics was never discussed in his family, which was something he associated with the town he is from.

From the interviews with these principled non-voters, it is clear that there are a variety of reasons for, and influences on, their decisions not to vote. Whether postmaterialist theory is a relevant factor in their attitudes and behaviour is yet to be established. To answer this, attention needs to be paid firstly, to how these young non-voters approach alternative means of participation, as well as their perspectives on political representation in New Zealand and their postmaterialist and materialist priorities.

Question Two -

How do young ‘principled non-voters’ choose to participate politically?

Participation in alternative methods of participation, i.e. participation outside of traditional electoral politics, is an important part of the literature on issues with democracy and the influence of postmaterialism on non-voting behaviour. In order to understand the political participation of these principled non-voters, each were asked in the questionnaire to detail the number of times they had participated in a range of political activities in the last three years. The questions were adapted from the NZES surveys and each activity is listed in Table 5.5 below. The participants were given an option of frequencies to choose from for each method of participation: never, once, 2-5 and 5+. The responses from each of the participants are detailed in the table below.

Table 5.5: Interviewees Participation Rates in Last Three Years

Name	Attended a public meeting	Contacted a MP or government official	Signed a petition	Participated in a product or service boycott	Participated in a protest, march or demonstration
Rebecca	5+	2-5	2-5	5+	5+
Chris	5+	2-5	5+	1	5+
Alex	5+	1	5+	2-5	2-5
Josh	5+	5+	1	1	1
Steve	never	never	never	never	1
Earl	never	never	never	never	never
Jess	never	never	never	never	never

As well as these questions, this area was expanded through questions in the interviews. Each participant was asked **‘Do you participate politically instead of voting?’**, **‘In what ways do you participate politically instead of voting’**, and **‘Do you participate any differently during an election year?’**. To further understand the relevancy and importance of less traditional means of participation for these principled non-voters, they were also asked **‘How effective do you think these methods of political participation are?’** and **‘Do you feel that other forms of participation have as much value or effect as voting?’**. The purpose of these questions was to gauge the level of political activity of the principled non-voters and to understand their views of alternative methods of participation. This represents an important perspective to the study of postmaterialist theory, as a key argument of the potential influence of postmaterialism on non-voting is the advantage provided by alternative methods of participation.

There was a clear distinction between those who actively participated instead of voting and those who did not amongst the principled non-voters interviewed. This distinction became evident through their answers to the interview questions, as well as their responses to the relevant questions on the questionnaire detailed in the table above. In addition to the

interview questions outlined above, the participants were also asked the question, **‘Are you involved with any volunteer work or do belong to any groups, like environmental or human rights groups?’**. The responses to all of these questions are detailed below.

Four of the participants (Josh, Chris, Alex and Rebecca) answered ‘yes’ to the first question about participating outside of voting, and claimed to be very involved in non-traditional forms of participation. This was also reflected in their responses to the participation questions in the questionnaire. Josh, who works full-time for a minor political party in parliament, also discussed participating through official debates and protests, which included one in the House of Parliament. Josh did not believe that he participated any differently during an election year, other than reading more articles about politics, stepping up his previous activities and “generally arguing with people”. He was also not involved with any volunteer or interest groups.

A significant part of Chris’s political participation was related to his concerns for workers rights. As well as regularly attending protests, Chris discussed his decision to get involved in a less conventional way:

Chris: This is a good one, in summer I go up and work in Auckland in a factory around workers and I try and promote and find out what’s going on. Like, to worry about the working class, you’ve got to be part of the working class

Chris also discussed his involvement with Socialist groups. This voluntary work means that he participates quite differently during election years, both in New Zealand and overseas.

Chris: Another organisation I work with run candidates and stuff in Auckland, in only like two seats, but we support them and help with the campaign for them. I went over to the U.S. last year and I helped out with our sister organisation in the U.S., helped their presidential candidate run

Interviewer: So that’s quite interesting, because it’s in the political, in the electoral-political world...

Chris: Yeah, we support someone but we don’t actually run ourselves

Rebecca and Alex both discussed numerous ways in which they feel they participate politically, particularly in the broad sense of the term ‘political’. Rebecca answered the

question of whether she participated politically instead of voting by first explaining how her behaviour has changed.

Rebecca: Yeah, I mean I think I do. And not in like, like I used to be a part of lots and lots of different interest groups and things like that, but I'm kind of not part of those kinds of groups anymore because I got frustrated with them and stuff. But I guess that I am in the sense that I sort of live my life with a kind of awareness of those kinds of issues and seek to do what I can. And I associate with other people that kind of think and act similarly I guess

Interviewer: Can you tell me about any specific ways you participate instead of voting?

Rebecca: I mean there's a whole range of things but lately I've been thinking a lot about the media and making your own sort of, like being the media. So I guess I've been kind of writing and participating in indie-media lately... Closer to home, thinking about how I support the people I live around in my community and stuff like that. And I mean some people might think that that is not particularly political, but I think it is quite political...stuff about how we go about living our lives and trying to create new ways of living, like outside of these structures that are really oppressive...I guess I'm an 'artist', so if I make art it's political... Maybe it's just that I ask lots of questions? Maybe that's like the most political thing that I do, you know?

Rebecca did not think that she participated any differently during an election year. Instead, Rebecca hoped that the way she acted would not change each year, other than any influence that gaining more information and asking more questions may have. Alex, on the other hand, made a deliberate decision to participate differently during the most recent election year:

Alex: Yeah. I think I stepped up a lot of my thinking around the election this year. I did quite a lot of 'don't vote' pamphlets and organising... I guess for myself I felt it was a good time to put forward alternatives while people were thinking about things

The remaining three participants (Jess, Earl and Steve) answered 'no' to the initial question of whether they participated politically instead of voting. This was also reflected in their responses to the participation questions in the questionnaire. Additionally, Jess and Earl both felt that they did not participate any differently during an election year. Earl mentioned running annual events for charity, but did not consider this to be particularly political. Similarly, Steve did not feel that his active involvement with Amnesty International and his volunteer work with Youth Line were political. Steve was slightly different, as he had

participated in a protest in the last five years and did feel that he participated differently in the most recent election year:

Steve: I've signed up for The Press [the local newspaper]. And I've definitely been paying a lot of attention to the news on the election, and I recorded the leader's debate of all things...just because it interests me. I've definitely been taking a bigger interest in the news and things like that

Significantly, these questions highlight the same divide between the participants that has been previously identified. It was Alex, Rebecca, Josh and Chris who stood out as the most politically active and the most willing to associate their behaviour with direct political action. This again places these four participants closer to the ideals of a principled non-voter. The other interviewees (Steve, Earl and Jess), had barely participated in any form of non-traditional political participation. This lack of participation distances these three principled non-voters from the expectations of postmaterialism and non-voting behaviour, as involvement in political participation outside of traditional electoral politics is a key part to in the postmaterialist arguments for declining voter turnout.

As well as looking at the ways that the principled non-voters chose to participate, it was also important to understand the attitudes of the participants towards alternative methods of political participation. Each participant, regardless of whether they did participate in these methods or not, was asked **'How effective do you think these methods of political participation are?'** and **'Do you feel that other forms of participation have as much value or effect as voting?'**. Their answers to these questions are now discussed.

The majority of the participants did feel that alternative methods of participation were effective. Four of the participants (Alex, Earl, Rebecca and Chris) were very confident in the effectiveness of activities like protest and boycotts. Earl's confidence in non-traditional forms of participation is interesting, as he had not actually participated in any form of alternative participation. Chris was particularly supportive of these methods, arguing that they are the "only participation that's viable". Alex was equally in favour of alternative methods of participation, but felt that an individual's effort needed to go further than signing petitions or boycotting products:

Alex: I think they're totally effective. What's ineffective at the moment is conveying those alternatives...workers and communities can ultimately change things because they're the most oppressed and they're the ones who are most affected by systems...so I'll support worker's strikes or I'll support lobbying and stuff, but I'll always say 'we need to do things more democratically than this, we're pretty limited in means of participation, we need to do things more directly and more communally'

Steve and Jess were less certain of the effectiveness of alternative methods of participation. For Steve, this reflected a degree of disappointment he felt following his participation in a protest that did not have the outcome he hoped for. He did, however, acknowledge the ability of protest to make "the nations' voice heard". Jess was also unsure, and she explained this by giving examples of protests she had heard about that had been successful and those that had not. Josh was the only participant who did not think that alternative means of participation were very effective. This was particularly interesting as he had used non-traditional forms of participation many times. Josh explained that he understood the motivation behind acts such as protest, but felt that civil disobedience was probably far more effective than legitimate methods:

Josh: I think protests are fairly expressive, they express people's outrage, but I don't know if they're particularly effective at getting government to change. And I think that's why most people do them because one of the things is I think most people feel frustrated that they can't express their opinions in any other meaningful way. And they know their votes are just aggregated, they don't feel like they're being counted, so they're more likely to engage in stuff like protests...but I think it gives them this false belief that they do have power in the political process, rather than making them think realistically about it

When it came to comparing the effectiveness of alternative methods of participation with voting, the results were even clearer. Jess was the only participant who was unsure, although she did acknowledge that there were more opportunities to be involved and participate through the alternative methods, given that voting could only take place once every three years. All other six participants felt that alternative methods of participation were more valuable or could be more effective than voting.

Earl: I think participation definitely has way more impact than a vote, definitely. You have to get out there and do something I think

Alex: Yeah, alternative organising and direct action are way more valuable because you start to appreciate the power you have as an individual within collective struggle. Like, to me voting is just one thing one individual does and it's nowhere near as powerful as collective struggle

Steve raised an important point that is a focus of postmaterialist explanations for declining voter turnout, which highlights the issue-specific nature of these methods and the benefits this provides. Steve argued that methods such as protest can be more effective than voting on big issues, as they provide a powerful way for people's voices to be heard on an isolated issue.

Steve: You could say that voting would be slightly more powerful, but yet it's because you have to choose over a range of policies and they're often grouped in groups that I don't think individual people fully agree with this group or that group. I think it's limiting in that sense. So I think that protests are a good way of saying 'here is one issue, I have a problem with it, yeah!'

An interesting question relating to this area of research is why these young non-voters, who do actively participate in alternative methods of political participation, do not also vote in conjunction with this participation. The questions of 'why not do both?' or 'why not just vote anyway?' were often presented to the researcher in a variety of informal discussions throughout the duration of this research. For many, the unwillingness of these young people to express their political views through both traditional and alternative methods of political participation was difficult to understand. In the interviews with the four principled non-voters who had frequently participated in activities like protests and boycotts, the reasons why they each could not 'just vote as well' were explained. For all four of these participants (Josh, Chris, Rebecca and Alex), this question exemplified the arguments behind their reasoning for not voting at all, and the motivations for each were closely linked to the ideological influences that they had previously mentioned. It was also something that all four clearly felt very strongly about.

Josh reconfirmed the importance of rational choice theory to his perspective on voting. He argued that the costs of voting were greater than the benefits gained from voting, due to the high level of centralisation in New Zealand politics, meaning that it was not in his own interests to vote in elections. For Chris, the capitalist nature of New Zealand's political parties meant that he could not ever support them. He believed that none of the current political parties in New Zealand were even close to being on the same spectrum as his beliefs, so it would be wrong to vote for any of them.

Rebecca believed that voting implied support for your system of government, yet this is something she feels she no longer has faith in or agrees with. She argued that voting was a way of giving permission back to the government and the broader political system to have power over her, and that she was more interested in organising at a local level. Alex demonstrated the strongest aversion to the act of voting, going so far as producing pamphlets and magazines that promoted alternatives to voting. For Alex, there were two main problems with voting in elections. Firstly, he did not believe that there were any political parties in New Zealand that represented the left or far left of the political spectrum where he placed himself. The other main issue that Alex had with voting was similar to Rebecca. He felt that it would be against his ethic to involve himself in the hierarchical system of politics, particularly as he argued that, by voting, the public were encouraged to be passive by delegating power to somebody else.

Question Three -

Is there evidence that a lack of political representation motivates the participation of young 'principled non-voters'?

Problems with representation are an important part of the postmaterialist arguments around why people are not voting. These arguments centre on the belief that the issues being represented by today's political parties do not reflect the interest of the postmaterialist generations. These arguments also closely relate to the discussion around the health of democracy outlined in Chapter Two, which questions the quality of representation in modern democracies. The behaviour and attitudes of principled non-voters are arguably consistent

with the associated trends, meaning that relating these findings to the wider literature is an important and interesting exercise. To explore the participants' views on representation in New Zealand politics, they were each asked: **'What are some political issues or current events that are important or interesting for you?'** and **'Do you think that any of New Zealand's political parties represent any of these issues?'**

This first question also provides some insight into the materialist or postmaterialist leanings of the participants. Although the focus of the question differs from that of Inglehart's measurement of materialist and postmaterialist values, which aims to gauge broad societal goals rather than individual needs, the participants' own issue priorities still provide an interesting perspective. As was outlined in Chapter Two, while materialist values relate to issues including economic needs and law and order, postmaterialist goals are associated with issues such as the environment and human rights.²⁸ The participants' responses to Inglehart's measures of materialist and postmaterialist value priorities are detailed in the following section of this chapter.

When asked what issues were important to them, Alex and Chris gave similar responses, which was largely a reflection of their mutual concern for employment issues and workers rights. Both also appeared to be guided by postmaterialist value concerns. As well as employment issues, Chris also referred to the media and the current economic recession as important issues for him. He did not feel that any of New Zealand's main political parties represented his views on these issues, although he did think that some of the small anti-capitalist parties like the Communist League reflected his views. Alex's additional areas of interest were issues between economics and class, the environmental struggle, and health and local issues, all of which he did not feel were represented by any of New Zealand's current political parties:

Alex: I think a lot of parties used to and probably did come from a working class perspective. [Today's parties] are more about being pragmatic and kind of making policies that suit a wide range of New Zealanders. So to me there's nothing really in parliament that represents the left of far left
Rebecca also mentioned similar issues to Chris and Alex.

²⁸ An important note here is the effect that particularly salient issues can have at specific times on any study of materialist/postmaterialist values (Davis & Davenport, 1999). This research was conducted amidst an economic recession in New Zealand, which could arguably increase the importance of economic issues at this time.

The most important issues for her included the minimum wage, workers rights, local issues, problems with young people being misrepresented in the media, women's issues and human rights abuses. Rebecca's main areas of concern are very closely aligned with the self-expression values argued by Inglehart (1997) as being postmaterialist. When asked whether she felt if any of New Zealand's political parties represented her views on these issues, Rebecca's answer revealed her scepticism towards political institutions:

Rebecca: Of course some of them do...in the past I have voted for the Greens. And I think that a lot of what they talk about it really good, and then I guess my concern is that it's still...I feel like a lot of stuff just ends up getting watered down, like, and compromised as sort of deals are made and things like that

Rebecca also discussed another problem with representative democracies for her, based on her previous involvement with lobbying the government and elected representatives on particular issues:

Rebecca: I think it's really disempowering...we elected these people to represent us and now we're having to lobby them to do things for us. Like, aren't they meant to be representing our interests?

The most important issues for Steve were areas relating to the economy, education, and the environment. These issues represent a combination of both materialist 'survival' values and postmaterialist 'self-expression' values. Steve did feel that his views on these issues were represented by some political parties, but there was not one party in particular that really encapsulated his point of view:

Steve: each party will do something I agree with and something I don't agree with, with different policies

Josh only raised two issues, the economy and drug laws, but he appeared particularly passionate in his disagreement with current drug laws:

Josh: People go 'drugs are bad so we want to ban them', without going 'what are the costs of actually doing so?'... Like, to me it's such a massive issue that affects so many people and yet nobody will be willing to address it

Josh also had an interesting response when asked about relevant political parties, which illustrated his concerns about the centralised nature of New Zealand politics:

Josh: I think the Libertarians, because their aim is not to be in power, they just say what they believe and generally I agree with them on most issues, with some exceptions

The one issue that Earl raised as important in his interview; crime and the need for harsher penalties, demonstrates a materialist leaning. Earl identified the Labour party as having similar views to his own, but was nevertheless unprepared to vote for them:

Earl: I wouldn't go so far as to go on the record and say that I like what these people are doing because I haven't studied what they do...you can't just go off the news

When asked, Jess raised a number of issues of importance to her. Some of the issues that Jess mentioned could be described as current events rather than broader ideological concerns, and included problems with youth drinking, the anti-smacking legislation, the economic recession, job losses, and ACC levies. She did not believe that any of New Zealand's current political parties reflected her views on these issues, but did indicate a preference towards the Maori Party.

The participants' responses to these questions reveal interesting perspectives to ideas around representation. Alex was adamant that there was no political party in New Zealand who represented his views and throughout his interview he showed his concern for the quality of modern representative democracies. This included questioning the lack of active involvement available to ordinary citizens and the trustworthiness of politicians and political institutions. Jess also argued that no political party represented her views, despite acknowledging a preference towards the Maori Party. Her lack of trust in politicians, in particular, stood out from her interview as a reason why this preference towards one political party may not have been enough to convince her to vote for them.

Earl was also able to identify a preferred party, Labour, who he felt did represent his views on particular issues. However, this feeling of representation was not the only factor that Earl considered to be important, arguing that without knowing everything about a party it was irresponsible to give them his vote. While Steve could not identify a single party that represented his view on issues, he did feel that the two major parties in New Zealand, Labour and National, each had policy that he could agree with. By not feeling completely represented by one specific party, Steve felt unable to vote for any.

Josh and Chris were both able to identify political parties in New Zealand who did represent many of their views on important issues, although these parties are small and outside of any serious electoral competition in New Zealand. Support for smaller parties is an important aspect of postmaterialist theory, which argues that postmaterialist generations are moving away from traditional political parties and finding representation in smaller parties. This argument has been used to explain the momentum of Green party support throughout many modern democracies, which has seen some Green parties rise from near obscurity to gain seats in parliament and places within governments.

Rebecca is an example of a member of a postmaterialist generation finding representation in a Green party, having voted for them in previous elections. However, it was issues around representation and trust in politicians and political institutions that saw her move away from voting. Despite still feeling that the New Zealand Green Party did represent her views on many issues, Rebecca believed that the nature of electoral politics often comprised ideological concerns and meant that she no longer felt comfortable participating by voting.

While problems with representation were evident for most of these principled non-voters, the connection between their issue priorities and postmaterialist theory were not as clear. Some participants did show a preference to postmaterialist concerns, or self-expression values, however this needs further study. The following section of this chapter discusses the materialist/postmaterialist leanings of the participants' based on the results from the standard measures of value priorities. The participants' results are related to their own expressed issue priorities to gain a wider view of their value concerns.

Question Four -

Are the political values of this group of young ‘principled non-voters’ consistent with those presented in postmaterialist theory?

This question was approached by asking the participants the standard questions for measuring materialist/postmaterialist value priorities and societal goals. These questions were taken directly from Inglehart’s (1997) twelve-item index described in Chapter Three, which measures the participants’ value priorities based on broad societal goals. Inglehart’s original four-item index is included in the expanded twelve-item index, meaning the results can be interpreted using both methods of materialist/postmaterialist measurement. This also means that this research can compare the results from the two indices and look for consistency between the different measurements. Based on the answers to the four-item index, respondents are classified as ‘materialist’, ‘mixed’ or ‘postmaterialist’. The twelve-item index produces a number between 0 and 5, based on the number of postmaterialist answers the participant chooses. Using this measurement, ‘0’ indicates a preference for materialist value priorities and ‘5’ indicates a focus on postmaterialist concerns. All of these results are detailed in Table 5.6 below. The results from these principled non-voters, although representing a small sample, provide an interesting perspective to Inglehart’s work.

Table 5.6: Materialist/Postmaterialist Results

Name	4-item index	12-item index
Jess	n/a	n/a
Earl	mixed	1
Josh	mixed	2
Rebecca	mixed	4
Steve	postmaterialist	3
Alex	postmaterialist	postmaterialist (5)
Chris	postmaterialist	postmaterialist (5)

Alex and Chris clearly emerge as postmaterialist, with the results from both indices reflecting each other. These findings are also supported by the issue priorities that both participants expressed during the interviews. Their concern for areas including environmental issues and human rights fit with Inglehart's descriptions of the self-expression values of postmaterialist theory.

The remaining results are not as clear and highlight the limits of using a restricted set of questions to interpret an individual's value priorities. Steve and Rebecca provide an interesting example of the flaws of the limited four-item index. This index showed Steve to be 'postmaterialist', although he only scored a '3' on the twelve-item index. Rebecca's results were similarly inconsistent, as she scored higher than Steve on the twelve-item index with '4', but only appeared as 'mixed' on the original index. The discussions in the interviews with these two participants show the results from the twelve-item index to be more reflective of their issue and value concerns than their results from the four-item index. Steve highlighted the importance of both materialist 'survival' values and postmaterialist 'self-expression' values, meaning that the mid-range score of '3' is appropriate. Similarly, Rebecca's score of '4', one away from 'postmaterialist', supports her strong interest in a range of postmaterialist issues.

Earl and Josh scored the lowest on the twelve-item index, with '1' and '2' respectively. They were also both 'mixed' according to the four-item index. The more materialist results of these two participants are consistent with their responses to the interview questions, as both raised important materialist 'survival' issues, namely the economy and law and order. Unfortunately, this section of Jess's questionnaire was incorrectly filled out leaving it impossible to draw any conclusions from her answers.

These results highlight the limits of the four-item index in making strong conclusions. Whilst three of the participants were considered 'mixed', their results on the more comprehensive scale ranged between '1' and '4', which is a significant variation. The results from the twelve-item index do provide a closer reflection of the participants' implied value positions. From the results that were complete, there is a good variety of participants across the twelve-item scale and an even mix of 'postmaterialist' and 'mixed' results from the four-item index. Interestingly, none of the participants registered as 'materialist' on either of the indices.

Future -

Each interview concluded with a discussion about the participants' future political behaviour and attitudes. The participants were asked: **'Do you think that your attitude towards voting could change in the future?'** and **'Can you think of any changes that could encourage you to vote in future elections?'**. Additional questions suggesting types of changes that could make a difference, such as a change in the nature of political parties or a focus on different political issues, were asked in some of the interviews where prompting was required. The participants presented a variety of answers for the first question, ranging between those that could envision a change, to those that could not see their attitudes, in particular, changing. When asked what kind of changes could encourage them to vote, there were strong ties between the respondents' answers to this question and their original answers as to why they did not vote.

Two of the principled non-voters (Chris and Steve) answered 'yes' to the first question, acknowledging that they thought their attitude towards voting could change in the future. However, both of these participants only felt this would happen if large changes to politics and party structure were made:

Chris: If politics changes... Yeah, if conditions in the world changed then political parties would begin to change [away from capitalism]

Steve: Yes, if there's a party that stands out for me amongst the others, then yes... I suppose a bigger centre party... Or otherwise just seeing a little bit more policy, stronger policy come out from National or Labour maybe... Something that would definitely encourage me to vote is if parties came out and said 'this is what we want to achieve' and basically outlined 'here are some goals', as well as 'these are some individual policies we think will be good and so judge us on them at the end of the election'

Two of the participants (Josh and Earl) felt that their attitudes towards voting would not change in the future. These two participants answered this question almost identically, drawing a distinction between their attitudes and the act of voting:

Josh: Um, no. I don't think my attitude to voting will change. That doesn't mean I wouldn't vote though

Earl: Um, no. I don't think my attitude would change, but I think I may vote in the future, but my attitude would remain exactly the same

Interviewer: Why?

Earl: I think just because I'm getting older and I'm finding out more and more information about things, so it could sway it

Their responses to the second question about any changes that could encourage them to vote were very different, however. Earl felt that there were certain situations where he would be compelled to vote in the future. Earl believed that if an issue arose that he had a particularly strong view on or that affected someone he cared about, which was supported by one of the leading parties and opposed by the other, then he would vote. On the other hand, Josh stated that only a fundamental change to either his own values or the political system was needed to convince him to vote:

Josh: An extreme decentralisation of political power, essentially... Any other? No, not really. No, I can only see me voting if my political opinions change significantly. I think that's highly unlikely, because, if anything, over time I have moved more away from the mainstream rather than towards it

The remaining three participants (Jess, Rebecca and Alex) were less sure. From these three, Jess seemed the most convinced that she may vote again, whereas the hesitation by Rebecca and Alex appeared to be pragmatic rather than a reflection of what they both actually believed.

Jess: I possibly do, it's hard to say at this stage. I'll probably decide at the time

Rebecca: Well, maybe. I mean you can't see the future... At the moment I just don't really think that governments are going to really do much to make life better for people and I think it's a really inefficient kind of way of actually solving problems. Yeah, I just think that the whole system is kind of geared up to kind of serve its own interests

Alex: I'm not sure. I guess it's changed in the last three years so maybe it could... But for me that just sends a mixed message. Like if I'm going to demonstrate through example and kind of live my life by these ideas, then

why would I vote and do them, why not just do them and show that its way more successful

The differences between these three participants were also clear when answering the second question regarding changes that could be made to encourage them to vote. The potential change offered by Jess was a relatively simple and even conceivable change to future election campaigns. It was also similar to the suggestion by Steve, as they both seemed concerned over the lack of accountability of politicians and information for the public:

Jess: They should come up with a whole political day or week even for each area so people can go up and be able to find out what they can from the leaders

Interviewer: So there's not enough information out there for people?

Jess: Not proper interaction because you can't ask them questions that you need answers to, and that sort of stuff is important

In contrast, both Rebecca and Alex did not feel that any, at least straightforward, changes could be made to encourage them to change their views on voting:

Interviewer: Can you think of any changes that could encourage you to vote in future elections? Like a change in the nature of political parties, or a focus on different political issues...

Rebecca: Yeah, I feel like it's beyond that. I just don't really have faith in parliamentary politics really... I just don't think that top-down is really the way to go... Like, I don't know. Maybe I'm talking about anarchism or something like that?

Alex: No, not really. Voting just legitimises that kind of structure and if we completely change the structure along the ways that I'd like to see things functioning there wouldn't be a need to vote in elections as they exist now... If you do believe in consensus and alternatives, then I don't think that changes in the voting system would encourage me to get involved, because you're still voting for that system with minority rule, the select few in power and making decisions and participation by the select few

Discussion and Conclusion -

This chapter has outlined the most important element of this thesis, the perspectives of principled non-voters, described in their own words. By detailing the participants' attitudes towards politics, and the ways that they participate politically, the interviews have provided an insight into the motivations guiding each of their decisions not to vote in general elections. Although they offer a wide range of perspectives to the broad issue of not voting, some conclusions can be made about the participants individually and as a group of principled non-voters. Table 5.7 offers a summary of each of the participants based on the guiding theories and issues of this research; efficacy, participation, representation and postmaterialist theory. From these results the suitability of the participants for this research and the relevancy of postmaterialist theory to principled non-voters are clarified.

Table 5.7: Summary Table

Name	Internal Efficacy	External Efficacy	Participates	Feels Represented	4-item index	12-item index
Jess	average-low	average-low	no	no	n/a	n/a
Steve	high	average	once	yes	pm	3
Josh	high	average	yes	no	mixed	2
Alex	high	average-low	yes	no	pm	pm (5)
Rebecca	high	average	yes	yes	mixed	4
Earl	low	average	no	yes	mixed	1
Chris	high	low	yes	no	pm	pm (5)

('pm' = postmaterialist)

Based on the results in this table, Chris, Rebecca, Alex, Josh and Steve emerge as the best examples of principled non-voters. They all showed high levels of internal efficacy and displayed the greatest interest and awareness in politics, both through their levels of political participation and their answers to the interview questions. While Jess and Earl do not fit the description of a principled non-voter as well as the others, they did each make a conscious

decision not to vote based on matters of principle and showed an interest and understanding of politics beyond that of general knowledge.

The relevancy of postmaterialist theory to the attitudes and behaviour of each of these principled non-voters is not as straightforward. To fit within the postmaterialist arguments behind non-voting, an individual would ideally show low levels of external efficacy and feel a lack of representation from traditional political institutions, have involvement in and be supportive of alternative forms of political participation, and have a strong interest in postmaterialist 'self-expression' values.

All of the seven principled non-voters interviewed had low or average-low levels of external efficacy. This reflects their general scepticism towards politicians, a lack of faith in political institutions and democracy in New Zealand, and doubt over the ability of their vote to count in an election. Beyond this common factor, however, the participants begin to disperse. Throughout the process of the interviews, a clear distinction emerged between the participants. Earl and Jess, who had already stood out as having lower levels of internal efficacy than the other participants, continued to deviate from the rest of those interviewed, as well as the expectations of postmaterialist theory. Both of these principled non-voters had not participated in any forms of alternative participation and did not show any leaning towards self-expression values or issue priorities. Jess was also the least certain of those interviewed about her decision not to vote and there seemed to be little evidence of any influence from postmaterialist theory. However, her decision not to vote did stem from genuine dismay with the current quality of political representation in New Zealand rather than apathy or ignorance. For Earl, the decision not to vote was something he felt very strongly about and was very much based on problems with the act of voting in representative democracies. However, there was very little relation between his views and postmaterialist theory. Rational choice theory appears to be a more suitable explanation for his attitudes and behaviour, given his concerns over the costs of being informed enough to make a valuable decision when voting.

Steve represented an interesting perspective, as he was the most supportive of the quality of representation and democracy in New Zealand, yet still had concerns and was unwilling to vote. He had barely participated in alternative forms of participation, aligning him more with Earl and Jess, but in contrast showed a far greater interest in politics and appeared to be relatively postmaterialist based on Inglehart's measurement. Despite the

results from Inglehart's indices, however, Steve seemed distanced from the other expectations of postmaterialist theory and, like Earl, demonstrated some alignment with rational choice arguments for not voting with his concerns about informed voting.

Josh also provided interesting results, as he fit all the expectations of a postmaterialist explanation for non-voting behaviour, yet was also clearly influenced by rational choice theory. He showed low levels of external efficacy, did not believe any viable political parties in New Zealand represented his views on the important issues, and frequently participated in alternative methods of participation. However, his answers from the materialist/postmaterialist questions showed a mixed result and his general views appeared more conservative than would traditionally be considered in line with 'self-expression' concerns. In addition, Josh clearly fit within rational choice theory and even mentioned, without prompting, the cost-benefit analysis that he had worked through in deciding whether or not to vote.

Chris, Alex and Rebecca stood out throughout the process as the most aligned with postmaterialist theory. These three participants were the most politically active and the most ideologically driven of those interviewed. They all demonstrated strong concern with the political systems and quality of democracy in New Zealand, and each did not believe they could ever participate through voting in these systems in their current form. Chris, Alex and Rebecca also reached the highest scores on Inglehart's twelve-item index, with '5', '5' and '4' respectively. While postmaterialist theory appears to be a potential influence on these young non-voters, they were also each strongly guided by ideological influences that place them outside of mainstream politics.

Chris was very anti-capitalist and showed his support for communist thinking, while Alex openly thought of himself as anarchist and Rebecca hesitantly referred to the possible influence of anarchism within her political beliefs. The impact of these political philosophies on their political attitudes and behaviour were clear, leaving questions around the extent to which postmaterialist theory was also an influence and whether there is any association between postmaterialist theory and these political philosophies. However, this also raises questions about what prompted this support for anarchism and communism, as it could be argued that postmaterialist factors including disillusionment with representatives and issue priorities outside of the mainstream are closely linked to postmaterialist theory.

In general, these findings do not suggest any strong or clear influence between postmaterialist theory and principled non-voters. However, the interviews with these young principled non-voters did support many of the findings in the literature on democracies and postmaterialist theory that point to changing ideas around participation and representation in modern democracies. All of these participants showed genuine disappointment in the current opportunities for participation within traditional politics and identified some of the limitations of representative democracies. While not drawing absolute conclusions on the phenomenon of young principled non-voters, this research has acted as an important starting point for future research into the motivations of these interesting and complex sub-group of young non-voters in New Zealand.

Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusions

Introduction -

The aim of this thesis has been to gain a better understanding of young ‘principled non-voters’ in New Zealand, an area of study that has previously only received very limited attention. As such, this research stands as a starting point for further research into the areas of young principled non-voters in New Zealand, as well as any relevance that postmaterialist theory may have on this. Postmaterialist theory was suggested as a potential influence on young principled non-voters in research by Sheerin (2007), which served as the inspiration for this research. This thesis used in-depth interviews with a small number of young principled non-voters in order to understand their political attitudes and behaviour and place these findings within the wider literature on democracy, participation and non-voting.

Three main aspects of relevant literature were addressed in this research to establish context for exploring the attitudes and behaviour of young principled non-voters in New Zealand. Firstly, to provide context for non-voting behaviour, the extensive areas of declining voter turnout and the health of democracy within industrial democracies were explored. Secondly, the key voting theories of the last century and their explanations for non-voting were discussed with the aim of understanding the main arguments for why people do not vote, as well as for placing postmaterialist theory within this area of study. Finally, the areas of youth participation and postmaterialist theory were explored based on the recent research from within industrial democracies on these topics. These areas of the literature and their importance for this research and the young principled non-voters interviewed are discussed below. This is followed by a section entitled ‘Research Analysis’, which discusses the merits and limitations of this area of research, and finally ‘Future Research, which outlines recommendations for further study in this area.

The Literature and the Research -

The Health of Democracy

As was discussed in Chapter Two, unstable and declining voter turnout across many industrial democracies has prompted concern for the health of democracy within these nations and led to extensive research into the causes behind these trends. From this research, particular factors have been identified that include the declining trust of political representatives and institutions, changing issue priorities, and the growing appeal of alternative methods of participation. Throughout the relevant literature it is argued that these factors have contributed to a situation where traditional politics and democratic practices are under threat. Much of this is arguably related to the increased availability of education and information, providing citizens with the confidence and ability to question the status quo. These trends are also associated with today's younger generations, as they have largely been the beneficiaries of these greater educational opportunities. This area of research was important to this thesis, not only because of its relevancy to non-voting behaviour, but also because of the strong ties between these trends and the core arguments of postmaterialist theory.

In order to gauge the relevancy of these trends in the literature to the attitudes and behaviour of the young principled non-voters involved in this research, the questionnaires and interviews used included questions about the quality of democracy in New Zealand, political representation, alternative methods of participation and the participants' issue priorities. All but one of the young principled non-voters interviewed for this research stated that they were unsatisfied with democracy in New Zealand on their questionnaire, and for most this disappointment was further expressed during their interviews. Across all of the areas of questioning, four of the participants stood out as the most disillusioned with the political structures around representation and participation in New Zealand. These participants also appeared as the most politically active and aware. While the remaining three participants did express concern with aspects of the political process, this was done less enthusiastically and with a focus on more specific individual concerns. In general, the findings from the young principled non-voters gave merit to many of these concerns around representation and democracy. This was most clearly expressed through the participants' low levels of external efficacy and their disillusionment with the value of voting.

The Voting Theories

Levels of voter turnout and the reasons behind why individuals vote, or not, has been an important part of political research for decades, long before the current fears around declining turnout and the health of democracy. The leading voting theories were outlined in Chapter Two, highlighting the diversity and range of perspectives to this area of study. Each approach deals with comprehensive and complex factors, all of which could not be addressed in this research. Instead, this thesis chose to focus on postmaterialist theory as an explanation for non-voting behaviour. Although not traditionally associated within voting theories, postmaterialist theory offers an important perspective to the study of voter turnout, particularly in light of the literature on the health of democracy, as a result of the ties between these two areas of research.

The potential influence of postmaterialist theory on these young principled non-voters was gauged by using both the standard measures of materialist/postmaterialist value priorities, as well as through their responses to questions around their issue priorities, representation and methods of participation. While postmaterialist theory did emerge as a possible influence for some of the participants, the true extent of this influence is unclear. The results from the participants involved in this research did generally show a preference for postmaterialist values. Although only two of the participants were classified as ‘postmaterialist’ based on the more comprehensive twelve-item index, none of the remaining participants were classified as ‘materialist’ on either index and each chose at least one postmaterialist value priority.

The three participants who appeared to be most in line with the key arguments of postmaterialist theory across all factors also held very strong political philosophies that had an obvious influence on their political attitudes and behaviour. The potential interaction between these factors, i.e. to what extent postmaterialist leanings may encourage support for anarchism or communism, or the reverse, is unclear, meaning that it is difficult to draw strong conclusions from these findings. However, it is clear that these three participants in particular fit with the expectations of postmaterialist arguments for non-voting. The remaining four participants, although having some association with postmaterialist theory, were not in line with the expectations. Surprisingly, rational choice theory emerged as an important influence for some of these participants. For one in particular, rational choice theory was an obvious

factor, although postmaterialist theory did also fit with some of his political attitudes and behaviour. For the rest, elements of rational choice theory, in particular the importance of informed voting and the costs of achieving this, were an important influence on their reasons behind not voting.

In general, all seven of these principled non-voters, although not fitting perfectly into the expectations of postmaterialist theory, did raise important issues around representation and participation. They all highlighted the problems with current forms of participation and expressed their general disillusionment and disappointment with the way that political representation functions in New Zealand. In doing so, this group of young non-voters drew attention to the existence of young New Zealanders who do have an understanding and interest in politics, yet choose not to vote based on important and legitimate reasons. This places them outside of the traditional expectations of young non-voters as being apathetic or ignorant, and confirms the importance of research which looks beyond this stereotype.

Trends in Voting Studies

Chapter Three of this thesis focused on the recent research emerging from industrialised democracies on the topics of youth political participation and postmaterialist theory. The research focusing on youth participation highlighted the extent of declining voter turnout amongst young people, as most of the research was prompted by record lows in youth turnout at election time. The research consistently showed that, although often not voting, today's young people were participating politically through alternative methods of participation and showed high levels of interest in politics. These studies exemplify the changes in the political attitudes and participation of citizens and highlight the extent to which this is particularly occurring amongst today's younger generations. Interestingly, much of this research also concluded that these trends are part of a generational shift, rather than being the result of life-cycle effects. This is important as it suggests that, rather than ending as today's youth 'grow out of' their non-voting behaviour, these trends could continue.

The impact of a possible generational effect is also an important aspect of Inglehart's (1997) work on postmaterialist theory. Inglehart argues that postmaterialist generations (those

born after World War II) have experienced levels of economy security that have given them the freedom to focus on priorities beyond the basic ‘survival’ values. This has arguably meant that today’s younger generations are able to focus on ‘self-expression’ values, such as human rights and the environment, which are not necessarily represented in traditional electoral politics. The measurement of value priorities represents the basis of Inglehart’s work, which has been accomplished using the materialist/postmaterialist indices outlined in Chapter Three. Inglehart maintains that across industrialised (and now developing) democracies, there has been a fundamental shift towards postmaterialist value priorities that has contributed to dramatic changes in citizen participation, issue priorities and traditional democratic politics. The extent to which this is occurring in New Zealand and whether we are a part of the growing international trends is unclear, based on the limited research, although work such as Wilson (2005) shows the popularity of postmaterialist value priorities, particularly amongst younger New Zealanders.

Research Analysis -

The topic of this thesis stemmed from a suggestion of a potential association between two relatively unexplored topics in New Zealand literature, meaning this thesis very much represents the starting point for this area of research. While postmaterialist theory has received some attention in the literature, young principled non-voters, and any connection between their political attitudes and behaviour and postmaterialism is very limited. As such, the focus of this thesis became exploring the intricacies of young principled non-voters and establishing the background and context for where these two areas of research may come together. This focus was encompassed in the guiding research questions of this thesis, which firstly aimed to understand the motivations and behaviour of the young principled non-voters. The remaining research questions adopted a wider approach, exploring the attitudes of the participants in the context of the literature on the health of democracy and postmaterialist theory.

Chapter Five detailed the results from the questionnaires and interviews with the young principled non-voters, with a focus on detailing the participants’ perspectives in their

own words. The responses to questions around their political attitudes and behaviour provide invaluable insight into why these young politically active and aware individuals choose not to vote. As has been discussed, these participants presented a variety of views and demonstrated how unique the decision not to vote can be. Despite this, some general similarities could be seen. The most important of these, which were also the most clearly expressed, were the levels of frustration and disillusionment with many aspects of democracy, participation and representation in New Zealand. This highlights an area of research that deserves greater attention, given the widespread influence these issues can have on general levels of voter turnout and apathy.

Future Research -

As has already mentioned, this thesis represents a starting point for this area of research, meaning there is plenty of scope for future research. The existence of young principled non-voters definitely deserves further attention, as it is vital to draw attention to the presence of intelligent, interested and active young people who are disillusioned and disappointed with the current systems of representation and participation in New Zealand. By taking on an exploratory function, the research did have to take a reasonably wide scope that meant the focus was not as specific as it could have been. As well as this, one of the main issues for this research was the difficulty in locating participants. The specific criteria associated with principled non-voters meant that there were a limited number of suitable individuals to interview. For this research, seven participants was a sufficient number for establishing the basis of this area of study and for exploring the relevancy of postmaterialist theory, although for any future research a greater number of participants would be important. To better test the influence of postmaterialist theory on principled non-voters, research involving many more principled non-voters, even if conducted solely through questionnaires, would be beneficial. More research on young principled non-voters away from a focus on postmaterialist theory is also essential.

Another related area of study, which was not approached in this thesis but represents an interesting area of research, is whether these young people should be encouraged to vote,

and if they should, how this should be done. This area of research raises important questions around the role of representatives and the value of different methods of participation. It is also important to explore to a greater extent why these young people feel this way and how prevalent these attitudes and behaviour are amongst the wider population. This requires far greater research into the political attitudes and behaviour of New Zealanders than is currently being conducted.

Conclusion -

As well as adding to the limited research on young people and participation in New Zealand, this thesis has drawn attention to a group of young people who do not fit within the stereotypes of young non-voters and who deserve greater study. The young principled non-voters interviewed in this research represent an important perspective to participation and representation in New Zealand, and it is essential to better understand to what extent their attitudes and behaviour are represented in the wider population. If New Zealand is a part of these growing trends away from traditional politics and towards alternative methods of participation and issue priorities, then steps must be taken to deal with this. Whether political parties need to embrace broader issues to reflect the concerns of younger generations, or whether alternative methods of participation need to be given greater value, should be examined. It is essential for young people to feel represented, yet if this is not happening within the current parameters of participation and representation in New Zealand, this must be addressed.

Appendix One: Interview Schedule

Section A: Interest in politics

- . What does 'politics' mean to you?
- . How important is politics to you?
- . Do you think politicians listen to young people?
- . What are some political issues that are important or interesting for you?
 - Do you think that any of New Zealand's political parties represent any of these issues?

Section B: Non-voting

- . What are the reasons behind your decision not to vote in general elections?
- . How and when did you reach that decision?
- . Do you know if the people around you, i.e. family, friends, colleagues, etc, vote?
- . Do you think it matters who wins an election?

Section C: Participation

- . Do you participate politically instead of voting?
- . In what ways do you participate politically instead of voting?
- . Do you currently participate any differently during an election year?
- . Are you involved with any volunteer work or do you belong to any groups, like environmental or human rights groups?
- . How effective do you think these alternative methods of political participation are?
 - Do you feel other forms of participation have as much value/effect as voting?

Section D: Voting

- . Do you think your vote could make a difference in an election?
- . Do you think that your attitude toward voting could change in the future?
- . Can you think of any changes that could encourage you to vote in future elections?
 - Would a change in the nature of political parties encourage you to vote?
 - Would a focus on different political issues encourage you to vote?

Appendix Two: Potential Interviewee Questionnaire

University of Canterbury

Department of Political Science and Communication

Name:

1. Are you currently, or have you ever been, on the New Zealand electoral roll?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. How many New Zealand general elections have you been eligible to vote in?

.....

3. Have you ever voted in a New Zealand general election?

☐ Yes

☐ No

3a. If you answered 'Yes' for Question 3, how many general elections have you voted in?

.....

4. In politics, people sometimes talk about "the left" and "the right". Generally speaking, if you can, where would you place your views on this scale? *Please circle one number.*

Left

Right

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

5. How interested would you say you personally are in politics?

- ☐ Very interested
- ☐ Fairly interested
- ☐ Slightly interested
- ☐ Not at all interested

6. Normally would you say that you...

- ☐ Seek out news about politics and government?
- ☐ Only pay attention when you come across news about politics and government?
- ☐ Don't pay attention at all to news about politics and government?

7. In an average week, but not during an election campaign, how much would you be likely to discuss politics, and with whom?

		Often	Sometimes	Not much	Never
a)	Members of your family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b)	People at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c)	People in the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d)	Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. In the past three years how many times would you say you have done each of the following:

: attended a public meeting?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ More than once

: contacted a politician or government official in any way?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ More than once

: signed a petition?

- ☐ Never
☐ Once
☐ More than once

: participated in a product or service boycott?

- ☐ Never
☐ Once
☐ More than once

: participated in a protest, march or demonstration?

- ☐ Never
☐ Once
☐ More than once

9. **How much do you agree/disagree with the following statements? *Please circle one***

- I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the political issues facing our country

Strongly Disagree-----Disagree-----Neutral-----Agree-----Strongly Agree

- Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't understand what's going on

Strongly Disagree-----Disagree-----Neutral-----Agree-----Strongly Agree

- People like me don't have any say about what the government does

Strongly Disagree-----Disagree-----Neutral-----Agree-----Strongly Agree

- I don't think politicians and public servants care much about what people like me think

Strongly Disagree-----Disagree-----Neutral-----Agree-----Strongly Agree

- The average citizen has considerable influence on politics

Strongly Disagree-----Disagree-----Neutral-----Agree-----Strongly Agree

- Voting is the only way people like me have any say about how government runs things

Strongly Disagree-----Disagree-----Neutral-----Agree-----Strongly Agree

- There are other things than voting that people like me can do that have an effect on how government runs things

Strongly Disagree-----Disagree-----Neutral-----Agree-----Strongly Agree

Appendix Three: Interviewee Questionnaire

University of Canterbury

Department of Political Science and Communication

Please read the following note before completing the questionnaire.

You are invited to participate in the research project 'Principled Non-voters and Postmaterialist Theory: An exploratory analysis of young principled non-voters in New Zealand' by completing the following questionnaire, which will be used to supplement the interview process. The aim of the project is to understand the motivations behind the political attitudes and behaviour of young 'principled' non-voters in New Zealand. The questionnaire is confidential and you may withdraw your participation, including withdrawal of any information you have provided. **Please note that this project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.**

By completing the questionnaire it will be understood that you have consented to participate in the project, and that you consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that your confidentiality will be preserved.

Name:

1. What is your age?

☐ 18 ☐ 19 ☐ 20 ☐ 21 ☐ 22 ☐ 23 ☐ 24 ☐ 25 ☐ 26 ☐ 27 ☐ 28 ☐ 29

2. Are you...?

☐ Female ☐ Male

3. What is your highest completed level of education?

- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Non-degree professional trade or technical tertiary qualification
- ☐ Tertiary (Undergraduate)
- ☐ Tertiary (Post-graduate)
- ☐ Other (please specify).....

4. Which of the following best describes your present position? Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ Working full-time for pay (32 or more hours a week)
- ☐ Working part-time for pay (less than 32 hours a week)
- ☐ Unemployed and/or looking for work
- ☐ Unpaid work
- ☐ At school, university, or other educational institution
- ☐ Other (please specify).....

5. Are you currently, or have you ever been, on the New Zealand electoral roll?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. How many New Zealand general elections have you been eligible to vote in?

.....

7. Have you ever voted in a New Zealand general election?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

7a. If you answered 'Yes' for Question 7, how many general elections have you voted in?

.....

8. How interested would you say you are in politics?

- ☐ Very interested
- ☐ Fairly interested
- ☐ Slightly interested
- ☐ Not at all interested

9. On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in New Zealand?

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Fairly satisfied
- ☐ Slightly satisfied
- ☐ Not at all satisfied

10. In the past three years how many times would you say you have done each of the following:

: attended a public meeting?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Two - five times
- ☐ More than five times

: contacted a politician or government official in any way?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Two - five times
- ☐ More than five times

: signed a petition?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Two - five times
- ☐ More than five times

: participated in a product or service boycott?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Two - five times
- ☐ More than five times

: participated in a protest, march or demonstration?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once
- ☐ Two - five times
- ☐ More than five times

11. In politics, people sometimes talk about ‘the left’ and ‘the right’. Generally speaking, if you can, where would you place your views on this scale? *Please circle one number.*

Left										Right
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

12. People sometimes talk about what the aims of this country should be. Below is a list of some of the goals which different people would give top priority. Which one of these do you consider the most important? And which would be the next most important?

	Most important	Next most important
A high level of economic growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making sure this country has strong defence forces	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seeing that people have more say about how things are done in their jobs and communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. If you had to choose, which one of these things would you say is the most important? And which would be the next most important?

	Most important	Next most important
Maintaining order in the nation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Giving people more say in important government decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fighting rising prices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Protecting freedom of speech	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. In your opinion, which one of these would you say is the most important? And which would be the next most important?

	Most important	Next most important
A stable economy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The fight against crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix Four: Advertisement for Participants

Non-voters needed for Political Science research project: I am looking for people aged 18-29 who are willing to participate in an interview (about 40-60 minutes long) about their political attitudes and behaviour. I am specifically looking to hear from people who did not vote in last year's national election but who are interested in political issues and may participate in other political forms. The information from the interview will be used for a political science Masters project, which is partially funded by the New Zealand Electoral Commission. Volunteers will receive a \$10 voucher for their time. I note that this project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. For more information please contact Holly at hkd13@student.canterbury.ac.nz.

Appendix Five: Information Sheet

University of Canterbury

Department of Political Science and Communication

You are invited to participate in the research project 'Principled Non-voters and Postmaterialist Theory: An exploratory analysis of young principled non-voters in New Zealand. This project is part of a Master's thesis in Political Science that aims to understand the motivations behind the political attitudes and behaviour of a group of young 'principled' non-voters in New Zealand.

Your involvement in this project will be participating in an interview of 40-60 minutes and completing a short questionnaire prior to the interview. You are guaranteed the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of the questionnaire or any other information provided. You will be contacted following the interview to give you the opportunity to read the transcript of the interview. I will be happy to receive any comments from you on it if you wish. When the research is completed I am also available to discuss the findings with you. The audio tapes and copies of interview transcripts will be securely stored during the duration of the research project, and will be destroyed after a set amount of time following the completion of the research.

This project is partially funded by the New Zealand Electoral Commission, and the results of the project may be published. However, you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used in the thesis and any further publications.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master of Arts in Political Science by Holly Donald under the supervision of Dr. Alex Tan. Holly can be contacted at 364 2987 ext. 8674, or by email at hkd13@student.canterbury.ac.nz. Dr. Tan can be contacted at 364 2987 ext. 7536, or by email at alex.tan@canterbury.ac.nz. He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in this project. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Appendix Six: Consent Form

University of Canterbury

Department of Political Science and Communication

Research Student: Holly Donald

364 2987 ext. 8674

hkd13@student.canterbury.ac.nz

Supervisor: Dr. Alex Tan

364 2987 ext. 7536

alex.tan@canterbury.ac.nz

CONSENT FORM

‘Principled Non-voters and Postmaterialist Theory: An exploratory analysis of young principled non-voters in New Zealand’

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis, I agree to participate in the interview and complete a short questionnaire, with the understanding that pseudonyms will be used and confidentiality will be preserved. I consent to the findings being used in Holly Donald’s Masters thesis, and understand that the results of the project may be published. I also understand that any audio recordings and transcripts will be securely stored during the duration of the research, and then destroyed after a set amount of time following the completion of the project.

I am aware that I am at liberty to discuss any concerns about the project with Holly or the research supervisor, Dr. Alex Tan. I also understand that I may withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information I have provided. I note that the project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

NAME (please print):

Signature:

Date:

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